"Death Thumbs a Ride" by ROBERT ARTHUR

JANUARY

Weird Tales

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A Thriller Classic—

THE SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH

Blood-Curdling Novelette

by

H. P. LOVECRAFT

In leather-neck language

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Tested treatment attacks infection. 76% of test cases noted marked improvement in symptoms. Easy, quick, delightful. No mess, no grease.

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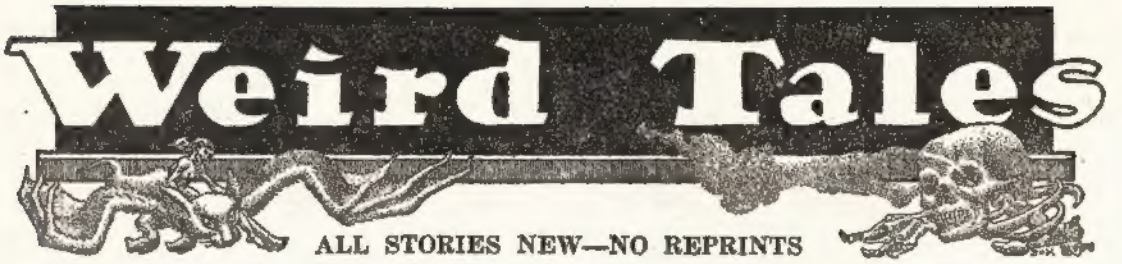

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JANUARY, 1942

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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Vol. 36, No. 3

D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* HENRY AVELINE PERKINS, *Associate Editor.*

"THIS WISDOM MUST DIE!"

Truths That Have Been Denied Struggling Humanity

FOR every word that has left the lips of bishops or statesmen to enlighten man, a thousand have been withheld. For every book publicly exposed to the inquiring mind, one hundred more have been suppressed—*damned to oblivion*. Each year of progress has been wilfully delayed centuries. Wisdom has had to filter through biased, secret sessions or ecclesiastical council meetings, where high dignitaries of state and church alone proclaimed what man should know.

Are you prepared to demand the hidden facts of life? Will you continue to believe that you are not capable of weighing the worth of knowledge that concerns your personal freedom and happiness? Realize that much that can make your life more *understandable* and *livable* has been left unexplained or intentionally destroyed. At first by word of mouth only, and *now* by private discourses, are *revealed* those truths which secret brotherhoods preserved in ancient temples and hidden sanctuaries, from those who sought to selfishly deprive humanity of them.

THIS *free* BOOK OF EXPLANATION

Let the Rosicrucians, one of these ancient brotherhoods of learning, tell you about these amazing truths, and explain how you, too, like thousands of others, may now use them to enjoy the fullness of life. The Rosicrucians, (not a religious organization) invite you to use the coupon opposite and receive the FREE copy of the fascinating, Sealed Book, with its startling tale of *self help*.

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WOULD YOU GO TO HELL FOR TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS?

If world famous scientists offered you ten grand — to act as official eye-witness of their attempts to conjure up demons and bring forth the dead — would you take on the job?

Watch out for scarlet temptations, for soul wrenching thrills, in your next number of WEIRD TALES! For its . . .

HELL ON EARTH

Robert Bloch's high voltage, suspense-charged drama of Satan in tuxedo!

HIDDEN in the topmost recesses of a modern skyscraper is a dark chamber, reeking of blood and musk — of hashish and the tomb. It is a room torn from the fifteenth century; a room torn from ancient dreams where ultra-modern tables, streamlined shelvings, groan with the impedimenta of forgotten nightmares . . . and shiny new refrigerators bulge with unnameable carcasses.

There is black madness here, in a velvet draped room . . . and red madness in the flickering braziers. For yesterday's magic is today's scientific fact — and those sound waves which shatter glass and even buildings — which radio hurls across continents — can become an incantation to reach round planes and angles of existence . . . *and pluck the harps that sound in hell!*

Don't miss this tale . . . Robert Bloch really "raises Hell" in his dynamic novelette of modern-day Fausts among the skyscrapers of Manhattan!

DOOM — HORRIBLE AND STRANGE . . .

Followed Tamy Challoner round the world, to catch up with him at last — the stolen, shrivelled head in his possession! This novelette — *Tibetan Vengeance* by Stafford Aylmer — is a thrilling, suspenseful tale of the weird and terrible ways by which the East gets its own back.

LOVECRAFT AGAIN . . .

In the flood of letters praising the publication of Charles Dexter Ward and The Shadow Over Innsmouth, so many readers asked for the Lovecraft series *Herbert West: Reanimator* that we did some investigating — and are now glad to announce that Herbert West, a young scientist obsessed with the idea of bringing back the dead to life, is scheduled to come alive himself in your next issue of WEIRD TALES.

Seven other whizz-bang thrillers — horrifying, humorous and futuristic, all guaranteed nightmare providers — promise a real shudder-making issue, genuinely weird from cover to cover.

Your MARCH Number of WEIRD TALES Goes on Sale January 1st.

IS YOUR Rupture GETTING Worse?

It is a terrible thing to feel that your rupture is getting worse, growing larger and larger, without your *seeming* to be able to do anything about it! Haunting fear destroys mental poise and makes many *despondent.* Inability to be active takes the *physical joys* out of life.

Yes, it is terrible . . . but far more a tragedy when it is all *so absolutely needless!* Now please—and again please—do not think that this is an attempt to capitalize on your misfortune in an effort to just sell you something. We simply have information for you that has brought deliverance and joy to about 3,000,000 persons: men, women and children . . . *facts* that have satisfied thousands of doctors . . . facts we want *you* to consider, to your everlasting good!

X Where's YOUR Rupture?

STOP IT, STOP IT!

AS sure as you live and breathe, if you have a reducible rupture, you can *stop your rupture worries* and once again find the world, your work, your pleasures so full of joy and happiness that you will be an utterly new person . . . alive, vivid, energetic and happy past all the old nightmare fears that have been making your existence a bad dream.

There is no claptrap magic about the famous Brooks Air-Cushion Rupture Appliance. It isn't something experimental. It has been used and improved for years. Over 9000 doctors (who know about rupture) wear the BROOKS, or recommend it to many, many thousands of patients. What is the Patented Automatic Air-Cushion? Just this.

WRONG

Hard pad gouging in keeps Rupture open and prevents natural healing.

RIGHT

BROOKS Air-Cushion does not spread rupture opening. Gives nature a real opportunity!

It is the part of the BROOKS Appliance that holds back your rupture — the most important part of any truss. It is a yielding, air-filled rubber chamber designed to a shape that clings, that holds with complete security *without gouging in.* Understand that — *without gouging in!* Ill-fitting, incorrectly designed trusses, as you know all too well, *do* gouge in.

Now here is what happens. The Brooks Air-Cushion *avoids* spreading the rupture opening and making it larger, the way some trusses do. Well, when the BROOKS permits the edges of the rupture opening to remain as close together as possible, Nature has the best chance to step in and close the opening. Mind you we don't guarantee this. But if you have reducible rupture, the BROOKS is designed to work with nature. And thousands of BROOKS users have reported the abandonment of any truss.

YOU CAN BE SURE OF NEW FREEDOM

The very day you put on a BROOKS Patented Air-Cushion, you feel that you have been reborn to the full joys of life! Men, women and children can know this indescribable thrill. Now why—why does the BROOKS give you such exceptional results? Why is it so often most outstanding in its accomplishments? Because the cling of the Air-Cushion makes it hold as nothing else can . . . because the wearer speedily comes to realize that there can be no slipping to let the rupture down . . . that while the BROOKS protects, the dreaded specter of strangulation is banished . . . because the wearer can indulge in every normal activity . . . because physical tasks can be resumed . . . because common sense says that everything humanly possible is being accomplished to improve the rupture condition. And here is another "because," a tremendous one to those who have suffered with the miseries of a hard, gouging, burning, galling pad that never lets up, never is forgotten. Your BROOKS will have no springs, no metal girdle, no agonizing pressure devices. Instead there is the utterly comfortable Air-Cushion and a velvet soft body band.

SENT ON TRIAL!

That's one of the best parts of all. You don't have to risk your money to find out just what joy and happiness a BROOKS CAN BRING YOU! You simply try it, and if not satisfied *the trial costs you nothing!* And anyone can afford a BROOKS. It costs no more than ordinary trusses. Every BROOKS is made to individual requirements, made especially to fit *your case.* Therefore it is *never sold in stores.* Guard against imitations. SEND THE COUPON AT ONCE.

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MAIL THIS COUPON NOW!

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152 State St., Marshall, Mich.

In PLAIN ENVELOPE, please send your FREE BOOK on Rupture, PROOF of Results, and TRIAL OFFER. No one is to call on me personally about my rupture.

Name .....

Street .....

City ..... State .....

State whether for Man ☐, Woman ☐, or Child ☐.

Unspeakable monstrousness overhung the crumbling, stench-cursed town of Innsmouth . . . and folks there had somehow got out of the idea of dying . . .

The Shadow

"One night, in a frightful dream, I met two Ancient Ones under the sea . . ."

DURING the winter of 1927-28 Federal government officials made a strange and secret investigation of certain conditions in the ancient Massachusetts seaport of Innsmouth. The public first learned of it in February, when a vast series of raids and arrests occurred, followed by the deliberate burning and dynamiting—under suitable precautions—of an enormous number of crumbling, worm-

Horrifying Novelette

by

H. P. LOVECRAFT

Over Innsmouth

"... in a phosphorescent, many terraced palace surrounded by gardens of strange, leprous corals."

eaten, and supposedly empty houses along the abandoned waterfront. Uninquiring souls let this occurrence pass as one of the major clashes in a spasmodic war on liquor.

Keener news-followers, however, wondered at the prodigious number of arrests, the abnormally large force of men used in making them, and the secrecy surrounding the disposal of the prisoners. No trials, or even definite charges, were reported; nor

were any of the captives seen thereafter in the regular jails of the nation. There were vague statements about disease and concentration camps, and later about dispersal in various naval and military prisons, but nothing positive ever developed.

Complaints from many liberal organizations were met with long confidential discussions, and representatives were taken on trips to certain camps and prisons. As a result, these societies became surprisingly passive and reticent. Newspaper men were harder to manage, but seemed largely to cooperate with the government in the end. Only one paper—a tabloid always discounted because of its wild policy—mentioned the deep-diving submarine that discharged torpedoes downward in the marine abyss just beyond Devil Reef. That item, gathered by chance in a haunt of sailors, seemed indeed rather far-fetched; since the low, black reef lies a full mile and a half out from Innsmouth Harbor.

But at last I am going to defy the ban on speech about this thing. Results, I am certain, are so thorough that no public harm save a shock of repulsion could ever accrue from a hinting of what was found by those horrified raiders at Innsmouth. For my contact with this affair has been closer than that of any other layman, and I have carried away impressions which are yet to drive me to drastic measures.

It was I who fled frantically out of Innsmouth in the early morning hours of July 16, 1927, and whose frightened appeals for government inquiry and action brought on the whole reported episode. I was willing enough to stay mute while the affair was fresh and uncertain; but now that it is an old story, with public interest and curiosity gone, I have an odd craving to whisper about those few frightful hours in that ill-rumored and evilly-shadowed seaport of death and blasphemous abnormality.

I never heard of Innsmouth till the day before I saw it for the first and—so far—last time. I was celebrating my coming of age by a tour of New England—sightseeing, antiquarian, and genealogical—and had planned to go directly from ancient Newburyport to Arkham, whence my mother's family was derived. I had no car, but was traveling by train, trolley, and motor-coach, always seeking the cheapest possible route. In Newburyport they told me that the steam train was the thing to take to Arkham; and it was only at the station ticket-office, when I demurred at the high fare, that I learned about Innsmouth. The stout, shrewd-faced agent, whose speech showed him to be no local man, seemed sympathetic toward my efforts at economy, and made a suggestion that none of my other informants had offered.

"You *could* take that old bus, I suppose," he said with a certain hesitation, "but it ain't thought much of hereabouts. It goes through Innsmouth—you may have heard about that—and so the people don't like it. Run by an Innsmouth fellow—Joe Sargent—but never gets any custom from here, or Arkham either, I guess. Leaves the Square—front of Hammond's Drug Store—at 10 A.M. and 7 P.M. unless they've changed lately. Looks like a terrible rattletrap—I've never been on it."

That was the first I ever heard of shadowed Innsmouth. Any reference to a town not shown on common maps or listed in recent guidebooks would have interested me, and the agent's old manner of allusion roused something like real curiosity. So I asked the agent to tell me something about it.

He was very deliberate, and spoke with an air of feeling slightly superior to what he said.

"Innsmouth? Well, it's a queer kind of town down at the mouth of the Manuxet. Used to be almost a city—quite a port befor the War of 1812—but all gone to pieces in the last hundred years or so. No railroad now—B. & M. never went

through, and the branch line from Rowley was given up years ago.

"More empty houses than there are people, I guess, and no business to speak of except fishing and lobstering. Everybody trades mostly either here or in Arkham or Ipswich. Once they had quite a few mills, but nothing's left now except one gold refinery running on the leanest kind of part time.

"That refinery, though, used to be a big thing, and Old Man Marsh, who owns it, must be richer'n Croesus. Queer old duck, though, and sticks mighty close in his home. He's supposed to have developed some skin disease or deformity late in life that makes him keep out of sight. Grandson of Captain Obed Marsh, who founded the business. His mother seems to've been some kind of foreigner—they say a South Sea islander—so everybody raised Cain when he married an Ipswich girl fifty years ago. They always do that about Innsmouth people, and folks here and hereabouts always try to cover up any Innsmouth blood they have in 'em. But Marsh's children and grandchildren look just like anybody else so far's I can see. I've had 'em pointed out to me here—though, come to think of it, the elder children don't seem to be around lately. Never saw the old man.

"And why is everybody so down on Innsmouth? Well, young fellow, you mustn't take too much stock in what people around here say. They're hard to get started, but once they do get started they never let up. They've been telling things about Innsmouth—whispering 'em, mostly —for the last hundred years, I guess, and I gather they're more scared than anything else. Some of the stories would make you laugh—about old Captain Marsh driving bargains with the devil and bringing imps out of hell to live in Innsmouth, or about some kind of devil-worship and awful sacrifices in some place near the wharves that people stumbled on around 1845 or thereabouts—but I come from Panton, Vermont, and that kind of story don't go down with me.

"You ought to hear, though, what some of the old-timers tell about the black reef off the coast—Devil Reef, they call it. It's well above water a good part of the time, and never much below it, but at that you could hardly call it an island. The story is that there's a whole legion of devils seen sometimes on that reef—sprawled about, or darting in and out of some kind of caves near the top. It's a rugged, uneven thing, a good bit over a mile out, and toward the end of shipping days sailors used to make big detours just to avoid it.

"That is, sailors that didn't hail from Innsmouth. One of the things they had against old Captain Marsh was that he was supposed to land on it sometimes at night when the tide was right. Maybe he did, for I dare say the rock formation was interesting, and it's just barely possible he was looking for pirate loot and maybe finding it; but there was talk of his dealing with demons there. Fact is, I guess on the whole it was really the captain that gave the bad reputation to the reef.

"That was before the big epidemic of 1846, when over half the folks in Innsmouth was carried off. They never did quite figure out what the trouble was, but it was probably some foreign kind of disease brought from China or somewhere by the shipping. It surely was bad enough—there was riots over it, and all sorts of ghastly doings that I don't believe ever got outside of town—and it left the place in awful shape. Never came back—there can't be more'n 300 or 400 people living there now.

"But the real thing behind the way folks feel is simply race prejudice—and I don't say I'm blaming those that hold it. I hate those Innsmouth folks myself, and I wouldn't care to go to their town. I s'pose

you know—though I can see you're a Westerner by your talk—what a lot our New England ships used to have to do with queer ports in Africa, Asia, the South Seas, and everywhere else, and what queer kinds of people they sometimes brought back with 'em. You've probably heard about the Salem man that came home with a Chinese wife, and maybe you know there's still a bunch of Fiji Islanders somewhere around Cape Cod.

"Well, there must be something like that back of the Innsmouth people. The place always was badly cut off from the rest of the country by marshes and creeks, and we can't be sure about the ins and outs of the matter; but it's pretty clear that old Captain Marsh must have brought home some odd specimens when he had all three of his ships in commission back in the twenties and thirties. There certainly is a strange kind of a streak in the Innsmouth folks today—I don't know how to explain it, but it sort of makes you crawl. You'll notice a little in Sargent if you take his bus. Some of 'em have queer narrow heads with flat noses and bulgy, starey eyes that never seem to shut, and their skin ain't quite right. Rough and scabby, and the sides of their necks are all shriveled or creased up. Get bald, too, very young. The older fellows look the worst—fact is, I don't believe I've ever seen a very old chap of that kind. Guess they must die of looking in the glass! Animals hate 'em—they used to have lots of horse trouble before autos came in.

"Nobody can ever keep track of those people, and state school officials and census men have a devil of a time. You can bet that prying strangers ain't welcome around Innsmouth. I've heard personally of more'n one business or government man that's disappeared there, and there's loose talk of one who went crazy and is out at Danvers now. They must have fixed up some awful scare for that fellow.

"That's why I wouldn't go at night if I was you. I've never been there and have no wish to go, but I guess a daytime trip couldn't hurt you—even though the people hereabouts will advise you not to make it. If you're just sightseeing, and looking for old-time stuff, Innsmouth ought to be quite a place for you."

And so I spent part of that evening at the Newburyport Public Library looking up data about Innsmouth. The Essex County histories on the library shelves had very little to say, except that the town was founded in 1643, noted for shipbuilding before the Revolution, a seat of great marine prosperity in the early 19th century, and later a minor factory center using the Manuxet as power. The epidemic and riots of 1846 were very sparsely treated, as if they formed a discredit to the country.

References to decline were few, though the significance of the later record was unmistakable. After the Civil War all industrial life was confined to the Marsh Refining Company, and the marketing of gold ingots formed the only remaining bit of major commerce aside from the eternal fishing.

Most interesting of all was a glancing reference to the strange jewelry vaguely associated with Innsmouth. It had evidently impressed the whole countryside more than a little, for mention was made of specimens in the museum of Miskatonic University at Arkham, and in the display room of the Newburyport Historical Society. I resolved to see the local sample—said to be a large, queerly-proportioned thing evidently meant for a tiara—if it could possibly be arranged.

The librarian gave me a note of introduction to the curator of the Society, a Miss Anna Tilton, who lived nearby, and after a brief explanation that ancient gentlewoman was kind enough to pilot me into the closed building, since the hour was not outrageously late. The collection was a

notable one indeed, but in my present mood I had eyes for nothing but the bizarre object which glistened in a corner cupboard under the electric lights.

It took no excessive sensitiveness to beauty to make me literally gasp at the strange, unearthly splendor of the alien, opulent phantasy that rested there on a purple velvet cushion. The longer I looked, the more the thing fascinated me; and in this fascination there was a curiously disturbing element hardly to be classified or accounted for. I decided that it was the queer other-worldly quality of the art which made me uneasy. It was as if the workmanship were that of another planet.

The patterns all hinted of remote secrets and unimaginable abysses in time and space, and the monotonously aquatic nature of the reliefs became almost sinister. Among these reliefs were fabulous monsters of abhorrent grotesqueness and malignity—wholly primal and awesomely ancestral.

At times I fancied that every contour of these blasphemous fish-frogs was overflowing with the ultimate quintessence of unknown and inhuman evil.

In odd contrast to the tiara's aspect was its brief and prosy history as related by Miss Tilton. It had been pawned for a ridiculous sum at a shop in State Street in 1873, by a drunken Innsmouth man shortly afterward killed in a brawl.

Miss Tilton was inclined to believe that it formed part of some exotic pirate hoard discovered by old Captain Obed Marsh. This view was surely not weakened by the insistent offers of purchase at a high price which the Marshes began to make as soon as they knew of its presence, and which they repeated to this day despite the Society's unvarying determination not to sell.

As the good lady showed me out of the building, she assured me that the rumors of devil-worship were partly justified by a peculiar secret cult which had gained force there and engulfed all the orthodox churches.

It was called, she said, "The Esoteric Order of Dagon," and was undoubtedly a debased, quasi-pagan thing imported from the East a century before, at a time when Innsmouth fisheries seemed to be going barren. Its persistence among a simple people was quite natural in view of the sudden and permanent return of abundantly fine fishing, and it soon came to be the greatest influence on the town.

All this, to the pious Miss Tilton, formed an excellent reason for shunning the ancient town of decay and desolation; but to me it was merely a fresh incentive; and I could scarcely sleep in my small room at the "Y" as the night wore away

II

SHORTLY before ten the next morning I stood with my one small valise in front of Hammond's Drug Store in old Market Square waiting for the Innsmouth bus. In a few moments a small motor-coach of extreme decrepitude and dirty gray color rattled down State Street, made a turn, and drew up at the curb beside me. I felt immediately that it was the right one; a guess which the half-illegible sign on the windshield—*"Arkham-Innsmouth-Newb'port"*—soon verified.

There were only three passengers—dark, unkempt men of sullen visage and somewhat youthful cast—and when the vehicle stopped they clumsily shambled out and began walking up State Street in a silent, almost furtive fashion. The driver also alighted. This, I reflected, must be the Joe Sargent mentioned by the ticket-agent; and even before I had noticed any details there spread over me a wave of spontaneous aversion which could be neither checked nor explained.

He was a thin, stoop-shouldered man not much under six feet tall, dressed in shabby

blue civilian clothes and wearing a frayed gray golf cap. His age was perhaps thirty-five, but the odd, deep creases in the sides of his neck made him seem older when one did not study his dull, expressionless face. He had a narrow head, bulging, watery blue eyes that seemed never to wink, a flat nose, a receding forehead and chin, and singularly undeveloped ears. As he walked toward the bus I observed his peculiarly shambling gait and saw that his feet were inordinately immense. The more I studied them the more I wondered how he could buy any shoes to fit them.

A certain greasiness about the fellow increased my dislike. He was evidently given to working or lounging around the fish docks, and carried with him much of their characteristic smell. Just what foreign blood was in him I could not even guess.

I was sorry when I saw that there would be no other passengers on the bus. Somehow I did not like the idea of riding alone with this driver. But as the leaving time obviously approached I conquered my qualms and followed the man aboard, extending him a dollar bill and murmuring the single word "Innsmouth."

At length the decrepit vehicle started with a jerk, and rattled noisily past the old brick buildings of State Street amidst a cloud of vapor from the exhaust.

The day was warm and sunny, but the landscape of sand, sedge-grass, and stunted shrubbery became more and more desolate as we proceeded. Out the window I could see the blue water and the sandy line of Plum Island, and we presently drew very near the beach as our narrow road veered off from the main highway to Rowley and Ipswich.

At last we lost sight of Plum Island and saw the vast expanse of the open Atlantic on our left. Our narrow course began to climb steeply, and I felt a singular sense of disquiet in looking at the lonely crest ahead where the rutted roadway met the sky. It was as if the bus were about to keep on its ascent leaving the sane earth altogether and merging with the unknown arcana of upper air and cryptical sky. The smell of the sea took on ominous implications, and the silent driver's bent, rigid back and narrow head became more and more hateful. As I looked at him I saw that the back of his head was almost as hairless as his face, having only a few straggling yellow strands upon a gray scabrous surface.

Then we reached the crest and beheld the outspread valley beyond, where the Manuxet joins the sea just north of the long line of cliffs that culminate in Kingsport Head; all my attention was captured by the nearer panorama just below me. I had, I realized, come face to face with rumor-shadowed Innsmouth.

It was a town of wide extent and dense construction, yet one with a portentous dearth of visible life. The vast huddle of sagging gambrel roofs and peaked gables conveyed with offensive clearness the idea of wormy decay, and as we approached along the now descending road I could see that many roofs had wholly caved in. Stretching inland I saw the rusted, grass-grown line of the abandoned railway, with leaning telegraph-poles now devoid of wires.

Here and there the ruins of wharves jutted out from the shore to end in indeterminate rottenness, those farthest south seeming the most decayed. And far out at sea, despite a high tide, I glimpsed a long, black line scarcely rising above the water yet carrying a suggestion of odd latent malignancy. This, I knew, must be Devil Reef. As I looked, a subtle, curious sense of beckoning seemed superadded to the grim repulsion; and oddly enough, I found this overtone more disturbing than the primary impression.

As the bus reached a lower level I began to catch the steady note of a waterfall through the unnatural stillness. The lean-

ing, unpainted houses grew thicker, lined both sides of the road, and displayed more urban tendencies than did those we were leaving behind. The panorama ahead had contracted to a street scene, and in spots I could see where a cobblestone pavement and stretches of brick sidewalk had formerly existed. All the houses were apparently deserted, and there were occasional gaps where tumbledown chimneys and cellar walls told of buildings that had collapsed. Pervading everything was the most nauseous fishy odor imaginable.

And I was not to reach my destination without one other very strong impression of poignantly disagreeable quality. The bus had come to a sort of open concourse or radial point with churches on two sides and the bedraggled remains of a circular green in the center, and I was looking at a large pillared hall on the right-hand junction ahead. The structure's once white paint was now gray and peeling, and the black and gold sign on the pediment was so faded that I could only with difficulty make out the words "Esoteric Order of Dagon."

The door of the church basement was open, revealing a rectangle of blackness inside. And as I looked, a certain object crossed or seemed to cross that dark rectangle; burning into my brain a momentary conception of nightmare which was all the more maddening because analysis could not show a single nightmarish quality in it.

It was a living object—the first except the driver that I had seen since entering the compact part of the town—and had I been in a steadier mood I would have found nothing whatever of terror in it. Clearly, as I realized a moment later, it was the pastor; clad in some peculiar vestments doubtless introduced since the Order of Dagon had modified the ritual of the local churches. The thing which had probably caught my first subconscious glance and supplied the touch of bizarre horror was the tall tiara he wore; an almost exact duplicate of the one Miss Tilton had shown me the previous evening. This, acting on my imagination, had supplied namelessly sinister qualities to the indeterminate face and robed, shambling form beneath it.

A very thin sprinkling of repellent-looking youngish people now became visible on the sidewalks—lone individuals, and silent knots of two or three. The lower floors of the crumbling houses sometimes harbored small shops with dingy signs, and I noticed a parked truck or two as we rattled along. The sound of waterfalls became more and more distinct, and presently I saw a fairly deep river-gorge ahead, spanned by a wide, iron-railed highway bridge beyond which a large square opened out. Then we rolled into the large semicircular square across the river and drew up on the right-hand side in front of a tall, cupola-crowned building with remnants of yellow paint and with a half-effaced sign proclaiming it to be the Gilman House.

I was glad to get out of that bus, and at once proceeded to check my valise in the shabby hotel lobby. There was only one person in sight—an elderly man without what I had come to call the "Innsmouth look"—and I decided not to ask him any of the questions which bothered me; remembering that odd things had been noticed in this hotel. Instead, I strolled out on the square, from which the bus had already gone, and studied the scene minutely and appraisingly.

For some reason or other I chose to make my first inquiries at the chain grocery, whose personnel was not likely to be native to Innsmouth. I found a solitary boy of about seventeen in charge, and was pleased to note the brightness and affability which promised cheerful information. He seemed exceptionally eager to talk, and I soon gathered that he did not like the place, its fishy smell, or its furtive people. His fam-

ily did not like him to work in Innsmouth, but the chain had transferred him there and he did not wish to give up his job.

There was, he said, no public library or chamber of commerce in Innsmouth, but I could probably find my way about. The street I had come down was Federal. West of that were the fine old residence streets—Broad, Washington, Lafayette, and Adams—and east of it were the shoreward slums.

Certain spots were almost forbidden territory, as he had learned at considerable cost. One must not, for example, linger much around the Marsh refinery, or around any of the still used churches, or around the pillared Order of Dagon Hall at New Church Green. Those churches were very odd—all violently disavowed by their respective denominations elsewhere, and apparently using the queerest kind of ceremonials and clerical vestments.

As for the Innsmouth people—the youth hardly knew what to make of them. Their appearance—especially those staring, unwinking eyes which one never saw shut—was certainly shocking enough—and their voices were disgusting. It was awful to hear them chanting in their churches at night, and especially during their main festivals or revivals, which fell twice a year on April 30 and October 31.

They were very fond of the water, and swam a great deal in both river and harbor. Swimming races out to Devil Reef were very common, and everyone in sight seemed well able to share in this arduous sport.

It would be of no use, my informant said, to ask the natives anything about the place. The only one who would talk was a very aged but normal-looking man who lived at the poorhouse on the north rim of the town and spent his time walking about or lounging around the fire station. This hoary character, Zadok Allen, was 96 years old and somewhat touched in the head, besides being the town drunkard. He was a strange, furtive creature who constantly looked over his shoulder as if afraid of something, and when sober could not be persuaded to talk at all with strangers. He was, however, unable to resist any offer of his favorite poison; and once drunk would furnish the most astonishing fragments of whispered reminiscence.

After all, though, little useful data could be gained from him; since his stories were all insane, incomplete hints of impossible marvels and horrors which could have no source save in his own distorted fancy. Nobody ever believed him, but the natives did not like him to drink and talk with any strangers; and it was not always safe to be seen questioning him. It was probably from him that some of the wildest popular whispers and delusions were derived.

The Marshes, together with the other three gently bred families of the town—the Waites, the Gilmans, and the Eliots—were all very retiring. They lived in immense houses along Washington Street, and several were reputed to harbor in concealment certain kinsfolk whose personal aspect forbade public view, and whose deaths had been reported and recorded.

Warning me that most of the street signs were down, the youth drew for my benefit a rough but ample and painstaking sketch map of the town's salient features. After a moment's study I felt sure that it would be of great help, and pocketed it with profuse thanks.

Thus began my systematic though half-bewildered tour of Innsmouth's narrow, shadow-blighted ways. Crossing the bridge and turning toward the roar of the lower falls, I passed close to the Marsh refinery, which seemed oddly free from the noise of industry. This building stood on the steep river bluff near a bridge and an open confluence of streets which I took to be the earliest civic center, displaced after the Revolution by the present Town Square.

Re-crossing the gorge on the Main Street

bridge, I struck a region of utter desertion which somehow made me shudder. Collapsing huddles of gambrel roofs formed a jagged and fantastic skyline, above which rose the ghoulish, decapitated steeple of an ancient church.

Fish Street was as deserted as Main, though it differed in having many brick and stone warehouses still in excellent shape. Water Street was almost its duplicate, save that there were great seaward gaps where wharves had been. Not a living thing did I see, except for the scattered fishermen on the distant breakwater, and not a sound did I hear save the lapping of the harbor tides and the roar of the falls in the Manuxet.

I kept north along Main to Martin, then turning inland, crossing Federal Street safely north of the Green, and entering the decayed patrician neighborhood of northern Broad, Washington, Lafayette, and Adams Streets. Following Washington Street toward the river, I now faced a zone of former industry and commerce; noting the ruins of a factory ahead, and seeing others, with the traces of an old railway station and covered railway bridge beyond up the gorge on my right.

The uncertain bridge now before me was posted with a warning sign, but I took the risk and crossed again to the south bank where traces of life reappeared. Furtive, shambling creatures stared cryptically in my direction, and more normal faces eyed me coldly and curiously. Innsmouth was rapidly becoming intolerable, and I turned down Paine Street toward the Square in the hope of getting some vehicle to take me to Arkham before the still-distant starting time of that sinister bus.

It was then that I saw the tumbledown fire station on my left, and noticed the red-faced, bushy-bearded, watery-eyed old man in nondescript rags who sat on a bench in front of it talking with a pair of unkempt but not abnormal-looking firemen. This, of course, must be Zadok Allen, the half-crazed, liquorish non-agenarian whose tales of old Innsmouth and its shadow were so hideous and incredible.

III

I HAD been assured that the old man could do nothing but hint at wild, disjointed, and incredible legends, and I had been warned that the natives made it unsafe to be seen talking with him; yet the thought of this aged witness to the town's decay, with memories going back to the early days of ships and factories, was a *lure* that no amount of reason could make me resist. Curiosity flared up beyond sense and caution, and in my youthful egotism I fancied I might be able to sift a nucleus of real history from the confused, extravagant outpouring I would probably extract with the aid of whiskey.

A quart bottle of such was easily, though not cheaply, obtained in the rear of a dingy variety-store just off the Square in Elliot Street.

Re-entering the Square I saw that luck was with me; for—shuffling out of Paine Street around the corner of the Gilman House—I glimpsed nothing less than the tall, lean, tattered form of old Zadok Allen himself. In accordance with my plan, I attracted his attention by brandishing my newly-purchased bottle; and soon realized that he had begun to shuffle wistfully after me as I turned into Waite Street on my way to the most deserted region I could think of. Before I reached Main Street I could hear a faint and wheezy "Hey, Mister!" behind me, and I presently allowed the old man to catch up and take copius pulls from the quart bottle.

I began putting out feelers as we walked along to Water Street and turned southward amidst the omnipresent desolation and crazily tilted ruins, but found that the aged tongue did not loosen as quickly as I

had expected. At length I saw a grass-grown opening toward the sea between crumbling brick walls, with the weedy length of an earth-and-masonry wharf projecting beyond. Piles of moss-covered stones near the water promised tolerable seats, and the scene was sheltered from all possible view by a ruined warehouse on the north.

About four hours remained for conversation if I were to catch the eight o'clock coach for Arkham, and I began to dole out more liquor to the ancient tippler; meanwhile eating my own frugal lunch. In my donations I was careful not to overshoot the mark, for I did not wish Zadok's vinous garrulousness to pass into a stupor. After an hour his furtive taciturnity showed signs of disappearing, and something or other had caused his wandering gaze to light on the low, distant line of Devil Reef, then showing plainly and almost fascinatingly above the waves. He bent toward me, took hold of my coat lapel, and hissed out some hints that could not be mistaken.

"Thar's whar it all begun—that cursed place of all wickedness whar the deep water starts. Gate o' hell—sheer drop daown to a bottom no saoundin'-line kin tech. Ol' Cap'n Obed done it—him that faound aout more'n was good fer him in the Saouth Sea islands.

"Never was nobody like Cap'n Obed—old limb o' Satan! Heh, heh! I kin mind him a-tellin' abaout furren parts, an' callin' all the folks stupid fer goin' to Christian meetin' an' bearin' their burdens meek an' lowly. Says they'd orter git better gods like some o' the folks in the Injies—gods as ud bring 'em good fishin' in return fer their sacrifices, an' ud reely answer folks's prayers.

"Matt Eliot, his fust mate, talked a lot, too, only he was agin' folks's doin' any heathen things. Told abaout an island east of Othaheite whar they was a lot o' stone ruins older'n anybody knew anything abaout, kind o' like them on Ponape, in the Carolines, but with carvin's of faces that looked like the big statues on Easter Island. They was a little volcanic island near thar, too, whar they was other ruins with diff'rent carvin's—ruins all wore away like they'd ben under the sea onct, an' with picters of awful monsters all over 'em.

"Wal, Sir, Matt he says the natives araound thar had all the fish they cud ketch, an' sported bracelets an' armlets an' head rigs made aout of a queer kind o' gold an' covered with picters o' monsters jest like the ones carved over the ruins on the little island—sorter fishlike frogs or froglike fishes that was drawed in all kinds o' positions like they was human bein's. Nobody cud git aout o' them whar they got all the stuff, an' all the other natives wondered haow they managed to find fish in plenty even when the very next islands had lean pickin's. Matt he got to wonderin' too, an' so did Cap'n Obed. Obed, he notices, besides, that lots of the han'some young folks ud drop aout o' sight fer good from year to year, an' that they wan't many old folk araound. Also, he thinks some of the folks looks durned queer even fer Kanakys.

"It took Obed to git the truth aout o' them heathens. I dun't know haow he done it, but he begun by tradin' fer the gold-like things they wore. Ast 'em whar they come from, an' ef they cud git more, an' finally wormed the story aout o' the old chief—Walakea, they called him. Nobody but Obed ud ever a believed the old yeller devil, but the Cap'n cud read folks like they was books. Heh, heh! Nobody never believes me naow when I tell 'em, an I dun't s'pose you will, young feller—though come to look at ye, ye hev kind o' got them sharp-readin' eyes like Obed had."

The old man's whisper grew fainter, and I found myself shuddering at the terrible and sincere portentousness of his intona-

tion, even though I knew his tale could be nothing but drunken phantasy.

"Wal, Sir, Obed he larnt that they's things on this arth as most folks never heard abaout—an' wouldn't believe ef they did hear. It seems these Kanakys was sacrificin' heaps o' their young men an' maidens to some kind o' god-things that lived under the sea, an' gittin' all kinds o' favors in return. They met the things on the little islet with the queer ruins, an' it seems them awful picters o' frog-fish monsters was supposed to be picters o' these things. Mebbe they was the kind o' critters as got all the mermaïds stories an' sech started. They had all kinds o' cities on the sea-bottom, an' this island was heaved up from thar. Seems they was some of the things alive in the stone buildin's when the island come up sudden to the surface. That's haow the Kanakys got wind they was daown thar. Made sign-talk as soon as they got over bein' skeert, an' pieced up a bargain afore long.

"Them things liked human sacrifices. Had had 'em ages afore, but lost track o' the upper world arter a time. What they done to the victims it ain't fer me to say, an' I guess Obed wa'n't none too sharp abaout askin'. But it was all right with the heathens, because they'd ben havin' a hard time an' was desp'rate abaout everything. They give a sarten number o' young folks to the sea-things twict every year—May-Eve an' Hallowe'en—reg'lar as cud be. Also give some o' the carved knick-knacks they made. What the things agreed to give in return was a plenty o' fish—they druv 'em in from all over the sea—an' a few gold-like things naow an' then.

"When it come to matin' with them toad-lookin' fishes, the Kanakys kind o' balked, but finally they larnt something as put a new face on the matter. Seems that human folks has got a kind o' relation to sech water-beasts—that everything alive come aout o' the water onct, an' only needs a little change to go back agin. Them things told the Kanakys that ef they mixed bloods there'd be children as ud look human at fust, but later turn more'n more like the things, till finally they'd take to the water an' jine the main lot o' things daown thar. An' this is the important part, young feller—them as turned into fish things an' went into the water *wouldn't never die*. Them things never died excep' they was kilt violent.

"Wal, Sir, it seems by the time Obed knowed them islanders they was all full o' fish blood from them deep-water things. When they got old an' begun to show it, they was kep' hid until they felt like takin' to the water an' quittin' the place. Some was more teched than others, an' some never did change quite enough to take to the water; but mostly they turned aout jest the way them things said. Them as was born more like the things changed arly, but them as was nearly human sometimes stayed on the island till they was past seventy, though they'd usually go daown under fer trial trips afore that. Folks as had took to the water, gen'rally come back a good deal to visit, so's a man ud often be a-talkin' to his own five-times-great-grandfather, who'd left the dry land a couple o' hundred years or so afore.

"Everybody got aout o' the idee o' dyin'—excep' in canoe wars with the other islanders, or as sacrifices to the sea-gods daown below, or from snake-bite or plague or sharp gallopin' ailments or somethin' afore they cud take to the water—but simply looked forrad to a kind o' change that wa'n't a bit horrible arter a while. They thought what they'd got was well wuth all they'd had to give up—an' I guess Obed kind o' come to think the same hisself when he'd chewed over old Walakea's story a bit. Walakea, though, was one of the few as hadn't got none of the fish blood—bein' of a royal line that intermarried with royal lines on other islands.

"Walakea give him a funny kind o' thingumajig made aout o' lead or something, that he said ud bring up the fish things from any place in the water whar they might be a nest of 'em. The idee was to drop it daown with the right kind o' prayers an' sech. Walakea allaowed as was the things was scattered all over the world, so's anybody that looked abaout cud find a nest an' bring 'em up ef they was wanted.

"Matt he didn't like this business at all, an' wanted Obed shud keep away from the island; but the Cap'n was sharp fer gain, an' faound he cud git them gold-like things so cheap it ud pay him to make a specialty of 'em.

"Things went on that way fer years, an' Obed got enough o' that gold-like stuff to make him start the refinery in Waite's old run-daown fullin' mill.

"Wall, come abaout 'thutty-eight—when I was seven year' old—Obed he faound the island people all wiped aout between v'yages. Seems the other islanders had got wind o' what was goin' on, an' had took matters into their own hands. S'pose they must a had, arter all, them old magic signs as the sea things says was the only things they was afeard of. No tellin' what any o' them Kanakys will chance to git a holt of when the sea-bottom throws up some island with ruins older'n the deluge. Pious cusses, these was—they didn't leave nothin' standin' on either the main island or the little volcanic islet excep' what parts of the ruins was too big to knock daown.

"That naturally hit Obed pretty hard, seein' as his normal trade was doin' very poor. It hit the whole of Innsmouth, too, because in seafarin' days what profited the master of a ship gen'lly profited the crew proportionate. Most o' the folks araound the taown took the hard times kind o' sheeplike an' resigned, but they was in bad shape because the fishin' was peterin' aout an' the mills wa'n't doin' none too well.

"Then's the time Obed he begun a-cursin' at the folks fer bein' dull sheep an' prayin' to a Christian heaven as didn't help 'em none. He told 'em he'd knowed of folks as prayed to gods that give somethin' ye reely need, an' says ef a good bunch o' men ud stand by him, he cud mebbe git a holt o' sarten paowers as ud bring plenty o' fish an' quite a bit o' gold."

Here the old man faltered, mumbled, and lapsed into a moody and apprehensive silence; glancing nervously over his shoulder and then turning back to stare fascinatedly at the distant black reef. When I spoke to him he did not answer, so I knew I would have to let him finish the bottle. He licked its nose and slipped it into his pocket, then beginning to nod and whisper softly to himself. I bent close to catch any articulate words he might utter, and thought I saw a sardonic smile behind the stained, bushy whiskers. Yes—he was really forming words, and I could grasp a fair proportion of them.

"Poor Matt—Matt he allus was agin it—tried to line up the folks on his side, an' had long talks with the preachers—no use—they run the Congregational parson aout o' taown, an' the Methodist feller quit—never did see Resolved Babcock, the Baptist parson, agin—Wrath o' Jehovy—I was a mighty little critter, but I heerd what I heerd an' seen what I seen—Dagon an' Ashtoreth—Belial an' Beëlzebub—Golden Caff an' the idols o' Canaan an' the Philistines—Babylonish abominations—*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*—"

He stopped again, and from the look in his watery blue eyes I feared he was close to a stupor after all. But when I gently shook his shoulder he turned on me with astonishing alertness and snapped out some more obscure phrases.

"Dun't believe me, hey? Heh, heh, heh—then just tell me, young feller, why Cap'n Obed an' twenty odd other folks used to row aout to Devil Reef in the dead o' night an' chant things so laoud ye cud

hear 'em all over taown when the wind was right? Tell me that, hey? An' tell me why Obed was allus droppin' heavy things daown into the deep water t'other side o' the reef whar the bottom shoots daown like a cliff lower'n ye kin saound? Tell me what he done with that funny-shaped lead thingumajig as Walakea give him? Hey, boy?"

The watery blue eyes were almost savage and maniacal now, and the dirty white beard bristled electrically. Old Zadok probably saw me shrink back, for he began to cackle evilly.

"Heh, heh, heh, heh! Beginnin' to see, hey? Haow abaout the night I took my pa's ship's glass up to a cupalo an' seed the reef a-bristlin' thick with shapes that dove off quick soon's the moon riz? Obed an' the folks was in a dory, but them shapes dove off the far side into the deep water an' never come up. . . . Haow'd ye like to be a little shaver alone up in a cupalo a-watchin' shapes *as wa'n't human shapes?* . . . Hey? . . . Heh, heh, heh, heh . . .".

THE old man was getting hysterical, and I began to shiver with a nameless alarm. He laid a gnarled claw on my shoulder, and it seemed to me that its shaking was not altogether that of mirth.

"S'pose one night ye seed somethin' heavy heaved offen Obed's dory beyond the reef, an' then larned nex' day a young feller was missin' from home? Hey? Did anybody ever see hide or hair o' Hiram Gilman agin? Did they? An' Nick Pierce, an' Luelly Waite, an' Adoniram Saouthwick, an' Henry Garrison? Hey? Heh, heh. . . .

"Wal, Sir, that was the time Obed begun to git on his feet agin. Folks see his three darters a-wearin' gold-like things as nobody'd never see on 'em afore, an' smoke started comin' aout o' the refin-ry chimbly. Other folks was prosp'rin', too—fish began to swarm into the harbor fit to kill, an' heaven knows what sized cargoes we begun to ship aout to Newb'ryport, Arkham, an' Boston. 'Twas then Obed got the ol' branch railrud put through.

"Remember, I ain't sayin' Obed was set on hevin' things jest like they was on that Kanaky isle. I dun't think he aimed at fust to do no mixin', nor raise no young-uns to take to the water an' turn into fishes with etarnal life. He wanted them gold things, an' was willin' to pay heavy, an' I guess the *others* was satisfied fer a while. . . .

"Come in 'forty-six the taown done some lookin' an' thinkin' fer itself. Too many folks missin'—too much wild preachin' at meetin' of a Sunday—too much talk abaout that reef. I guess I done a bit by tellin' Selectman Mowry what I see from the cupalo. They was a party one night as follered Obed's craowd aout to the reef, an' I heerd shots betwixt the dories. Nex' day Obed an' thutty-two others was in jail, with everybody a-wonderin' jest what was afoot an' jest what charge agin 'em cud be got to holt. God, ef anybody'd looked ahead . . . a couple o' weeks later, when nothin' had ben throwed into the sea fer that long. . . ."

Zadok was showing signs of fright and exhaustion, and I let him keep silence for a while, though glancing apprehensively at my watch. The tide had turned and was coming in now, and the sound of the waves seemed to arouse him.

"That awful night. . . . I seed 'em. . . . I was up in the cupalo . . . hordes of 'em . . . swarms of 'em . . . all over the reef an' swimmin' up the harbor into the Manuxet. . . . God, what happened in the streets of Innsmouth that night . . . they rattled our door, but pa wouldn't open . . . then he clumb aout the kitchen winder with his musket to find Selectman Mowry an' see what he cud do. . . . Maounds o' the dead an' the dyin' . . . shots an' screams . . . shaoutin' in Ol' Squar an' Taown Squar an' New Church Green . . . jail

throwed open . . . proclamation . . . treason . . . called it the plague when folks come in an' faound haff our people missin' . . . nobody left but them as ud jine in with Obed an' them things or else keep quiet . . . never heerd o' my pa no more. . . ."

The old man was panting, and perspiring profusely. His grip on my shoulder tightened.

"Everything cleaned up in the mornin'—but they was *traces* . . . Obed he kinder takes charge an' says things is goin' to be changed . . . *others'll* worship with us at meetin'-time, an' sarten haouses hez got to entertain *guests* . . . *they* wanted to mix like they done with the Kanakys, an' he fer one didn't feel baound to stop 'em. Far gone, was Obed . . . jest like a crazy man on the subjeck. He says they brung us fish an' treasure, an' shud hev what they hankered arter. . . .

"Nothin' was to be diff'runt on the aoutside, only we was to keep shy o' strangers ef we knowed what was good fer us. We all hed to take the Oath o' Dagon, an' later on they was secon' an' third Oaths that some of us took. Them as ud help special, ud git special rewards—gold an' sech. No use balkin', fer they was millions of 'em daown thar. They'd ruther not start risin' an' wipin' aout humankind, but ef they was gave away an' forced to, they cud do a lot toward jest that.

"Yield up enough sacrifices an' savage knick-knacks an' harborage in the taown when they wanted it, an' they'd let well enough alone. All in the band of the faithful—Order o' Dagon—an' the children shud never die, but go back to the Mother Hydra an' Father Dagon what we all come from onct—*Iä! Iä! Cthulhu fhtagn! Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgahnagl fhtagn—*"

Old Zadok began to moan now, and tears were coursing down his channelled cheeks into the depths of his beard.

"God, what I seen senct I was fifteen year' old—*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin!*—the folks as was missin', an' them as kilt theirselves—them as told things in Arkham or Ipswich or sech places was all called crazy, like you're a-callin' me right naow—but God, what I seen—they'd a kilt me long ago fer what I know, only I'd took the fust an' secon' Oaths o' Dagon offen Obed, so was pertected unlessen a jury of 'em proved I told things knowin' an' delib'rit . . . but I wudn't take the third Oath —I'd a died ruther'n take that—

"It got wuss araound Civil War time, *when children born senct 'forty-six begun to grow up*—some of 'em, that is. I was afeard—never did no pryin' arter that awful night, an' never see one o'—*them*—clost to in all my life. That is, never no full-blooded one. Barnabas Marsh that runs the refin'ry naow is Obed's grandson by his fust wife—son of Onesiphorus, his eldest son, *but his mother was another o' them as wa'n't never seed aoutdoors.*

"Right naow Barnabas is abaout changed. Can't shet his eyes no more, an' is all aout o' shape. They say he still wears clothes, but he'll take to the water soon." . . .

The sound of the incoming tide was now very insistent, and little by little it seemed to change the old man's mood from maudlin tearfulness to watchful fear. He would pause now and then to renew those nervous glances over his shoulder or out toward the reef, and despite the wild absurdity of his tale, I could not help beginning to share his vague apprehensiveness. Zadok now grew shriller, and seemed to be trying to whip up his courage with louder speech.

"Hey, yew, why dun't ye say somethin'? Haow'd ye like to be livin' in a taown like this, with everything a-rottin' an' a-dyin', an' boarded-up monsters crawlin' an' bleatin' an' barkin' an' hoppin' araoun' black cellars an' attics every way ye turn? Hey? Wal, Sir, *let me tell ye that aint the wust!*"

Zadok was really screaming now, and

the mad frenzy of his voice disturbed me more than I care to own.

"Curse ye, dun't set thar a-starin' at me with them eyes—I tell Obed Marsh he's in hell, an' hez got to stay thar! Heh, heh . . . in hell, I says! Can't git me—I hain't done nothin' nor told nobody nothin'—

"Oh, you, young feller? Wal, even ef I hain't told nobody nothin' yet, I'm a-goin' to naow! Yew jest set still an' listen to me, boy—this is what I ain't never told nobody. . . . I says I didn't get to do no pryin' arter that night—*but I found things aout jest the same!*

"Yew want to know what the reel horror is, hey? Wal, it's this—it ain't what them fish devils *hez done, but what they're a-goin' to do!* They're a-bringin' things up aout o' what they come from into the taown—ben doin' it fer years, an' slackenin' up lately. Them haouses north o' the river betwixt Water an' Main Streets is full of 'em—them devils *an' what they brung*—an' when they git ready . . . I say, *when they git ready* . . . ever hear tell of a *shoggoth? . . .*

"Hey, d'ye hear me? I tell ye I *know what them things be—I seen 'em one night when* . . . EH-AHHHH—AH! E'YAAHHHH. . . ."

The hideous suddenness and inhuman frightfulness of the old man's shriek almost made me faint. His eyes, looking past me toward the malodorous sea, were positively starting from his head; while his face was a mask of fear worthy of Greek tragedy. His bony claw dug monstrously into my shoulder, and he made no motion as I turned my head to look at whatever he had glimpsed.

There was nothing that I could see. Only the incoming tide, with perhaps one set of ripples more local than the long-flung line of breakers. But now Zadok was shaking me, and I turned back to watch the melting of that fear-frozen face into a chaos of twitching eyelids and mumbling gums. Presently his voice came back—albeit as a trembling whisper.

"Git aout o' here! Git aout o' here! *They seen us*—git aout fer your life! Dun't wait fer nothin'—*they know naow*— Run fer it—quick—*aout o' this taown—"*

Another heavy wave dashed against the loosening masonry of the bygone wharf, and changed the mad ancient's whisper to another inhuman and blood-curdling scream.

"E-YAAAHHHH! . . .

"YHAAAAAAAA! . . ."

Before I could recover my scattered wits he had relaxed his clutch on my shoulder and dashed wildly inland toward the street, reeling northward around the ruined warehouse wall.

I glanced back at the sea, but there was nothing there. And when I reached Water Street and looked along it toward the north there was no remaining trace of Zadok Allen.

IV

I CAN hardly describe the mood in which I was left by this harrowing episode—an episode at once mad and pitiful, grotesque and terrifying. The grocery boy had prepared me for it, yet the reality left me none the less bewildered and disturbed. Puerile though the story was, old Zadok's insane earnestness and horror had communicated to me a mounting unrest which joined with my earlier sense of loathing for the town and its blight of intangible shadow.

The hour had grown perilously late—my watch said 7:15, and the Arkham bus left Town Square at eight—so I tried to give my thoughts as neutral and practical a cast as possible, meanwhile walking rapidly through the deserted streets of gaping roofs and leaning houses toward the hotel where I had checked my valise and would find my bus.

Studying the grocery youth's map and seeking a route I had not traversed before, I chose Marsh Street instead of State for my approach to Town Square. Near the corner of Fall Street I began to see scattered groups of furtive whisperers, and when I finally reached the Square I saw that almost all the loiterers were congregated around the door of the Gilman House. It seemed as if many bulging, watery, unwinking eyes looked oddly at me as I claimed my valise in the lobby, and I hoped that none of these unpleasant creatures would be my fellow-passengers on the coach.

The bus, rather early, rattled in with three passengers somewhat before eight, and an evil-looking fellow on the sidewalk muttered a few indistinguishable words to the driver. I was, it appeared, in very bad luck. There had been something wrong with the engine, despite the excellent time made from Newburyport, and the bus could not complete the journey to Arkham. No, it could not possibly be repaired that night, nor was there any other way of getting transportation out of Innsmouth, either to Arkham or elsewhere. Sargent was sorry, but I would have to stop over at the Gilman. Probably the clerk would make the price easy for me, but there was nothing else to do. Almost dazed by this sudden obstacle, and violently dreading the fall of night in this decaying and half-unlighted town, I left the bus and reentered the hotel lobby; where the sullen, queer-looking night clerk told me I could have Room 428 on next the top floor—large, but without running water—for a dollar.

Despite what I had heard of this hotel in Newburyport, I signed the register, paid my dollar, let the clerk take my valise, and followed that sour, solitary attendant up three creaking flights of stairs past dusty corridors which seemed wholly devoid of life. My room, a dismal rear one with two windows and bare, cheap furnishings, overlooked a dingy courtyard otherwise hemmed in by low, deserted brick blocks, and commanded a view of decrepit westward-stretching roofs with a marshy countryside beyond. At the end of the corridor was a bathroom—a discouraging relique with ancient marble bowl, tin tub, faint electric light, and musty wooden panelling around all the plumbing fixtures.

As twilight deepened I turned on the one feeble electric bulb over the cheap, iron-framed bed, and tried as best I could to read. I felt it advisable to keep my mind wholesomely occupied, for it would not do to brood over the abnormalities of this ancient, blight-shadowed town while I was still within its borders. The insane yarn I had heard from the aged drunkard did not promise very pleasant dreams, and I felt I must keep the image of his wild, watery eyes as far as possible from my imagination.

Another thing that disturbed me was the absence of a bolt on the door of my room. One had been there, as marks clearly showed, but there were signs of recent removal. No doubt it had become out of order, like so many other things in this decrepit edifice. In my nervousness I looked around and discovered a bolt on the clothespress which seemed to be of the same size, judging from the marks, as the one formerly on the door. To gain a partial relief from the general tension I busied myself by transferring this hardware to the vacant place with the aid of a handy three-in-one device including a screw-driver which I kept on my keyring. The bolt fitted perfectly, and I was somewhat relieved when I knew that I could shoot it firmly upon retiring. There were adequate bolts on the two lateral doors to connecting rooms, and these I proceeded to fasten.

I did not undress, but decided to read till I was sleepy and then lie down with only my coat, collar, and shoes off. Taking a pocket flashlight from my valise, I

placed it in my trousers, so that I could read my watch if I woke up later in the dark. Drowsiness, however, did not come; and when I stopped to analyze my thoughts I found to my disquiet that I was really unconsciously listening for something—listening for something which I dreaded but could not name.

At length, feeling a fatigue which had nothing of drowsiness in it, I bolted the newly outfitted hall door, turned off the light, and threw myself down on the hard, uneven bed—coat, collar, shoes, and all. In the darkness every faint noise of the night seemed magnified, and a flood of doubly unpleasant thoughts swept over me. I was sorry I had put out the light, yet was too tired to rise and turn it on again. Then, after a long, dreary interval, and prefaced by a fresh creaking of stairs and corridor, there came that soft, damnably unmistakable sound which seemed like a malign fulfilment of all my apprehensions. Without the least shadow of a doubt, the lock on my hall door was being tried — cautiously, furtively, tentatively—with a key.

The change in the menace from vague premonition to immediate reality was a profound shock, and fell upon me with the force of a genuine blow. It never once occurred to me that the fumbling might be a mere mistake. Malign purpose was all I could think of, and I kept deathly quiet, awaiting the would-be intruder's next move.

After a time the cautious rattling ceased, and I heard the room to the north entered with a pass key. Then the lock of the connecting door to my room was softly tried. The bolt held, of course, and I heard the floor creak as the prowler left the room. After a moment there came another soft rattling, and I knew that the room to the south of me was being entered. Again a furtive trying of a bolted connecting door, and again a receding creaking. This time the creaking went along the hall and down the stairs, so I knew that the prowler had realized the bolted condition of my doors and was giving up his attempt for a time.

The one thing to do was to get out of that hotel alive as quickly as I could, and through some channel other than the front stairs and lobby!

Rising softly and throwing my flashlight on the switch, I sought to light the bulb over my bed in order to choose and pocket some belongings for a swift, valiseless flight. Nothing, however, happened; and I saw that the power had been cut off. So, filling my pockets with the flashlight's aid, I put on my hat and tiptoed to the windows to consider chances of descent. Despite the state's safety regulations there was no fire escape on this side of the hotel, and I saw that my windows commanded only a sheer three-story drop to the cobbled courtyard. On the right and left, however, some ancient brick business blocks abutted on the hotel; their slant roofs coming up to a reasonable jumping distance from my fourth-story level. To reach either of these lines of buildings I would have to be in a room two doors from my own—in one case on the north and in the other case on the south—and my mind instantly set to work calculating what chances I had of making the transfer.

First, I reinforced my own outer door by pushing the bureau against it—little by little, in order to make a minimum of sound. Then, gathering from the grocery boy's map that the best route out of town was southward, I glanced first at the connecting door on the south side of the room. It was designed to open in my direction, hence I saw—after drawing the bolt and finding other fastenings in place—it was not a favorable one for forcing. Accordingly abandoning it as a route, I cautiously moved the bedstead against it to hamper any attack which might be made on it later from the next room. The door on the north was hung to open away from me, and this

—though a test proved it to be locked or bolted from the other side—I knew must be my route. If I could gain the roofs of the buildings in Paine Street and descend successfully to the ground level, I might perhaps dart through the courtyard and the adjacent or opposite buildings to Washington or Bates—or else emerge in Paine and edge around southward into Washington. In any case, I would aim to strike Washington somehow and get quickly out of the Town Square region. My preference would be to avoid Paine, since the fire station there might be open all night.

I was irresolutely speculating on when I had better attack the northward door, and on how I could least audibly manage it, when I noticed that the vague noises underfoot had given place to a fresh and heavier creaking of the stairs. A wavering flicker of light showed through my transom, and the boards of the corridor began to groan with a ponderous load. Muffled sounds of possible vocal origin approached, and at length a firm knock came at my outer door.

For a moment I simply held my breath and waited. Eternities seemed to elapse, and the nauseous fishy odor of my environment seemed to mount suddenly and spectacularly. Then the knocking was repeated—continuously, and with growing insistence. I knew that the time for action had come, and forthwith drew the bolt of the northward connecting door, bracing myself for the task of battering it open. The knocking waxed louder, and I hoped that its volume would cover the sound of my efforts. At last beginning my attempt, I lunged again and again at the thin panelling with my left shoulder, heedless of shock or pain.

Finally the connecting door gave, but with such a crash that I knew those outside must have heard. Instantly the outside knocking became a violent battering, while keys sounded ominously in the hall doors of the rooms on both sides of me. Rushing through the newly opened connection, I succeeded in bolting the northerly hall door before the lock could be turned; but even as I did so I heard the hall door of the third room—the one from whose window I had hoped to reach the roof below—being tried with a pass key.

For an instant I felt absolute despair, since my trapping in a chamber with no window egress seemed complete. Then, with a dazed automatism, I made for the next connecting door and performed the blind motion of pushing at it in an effort to get through!

Sheer fortunate chance gave me my reprieve—for the connecting door before me was not only unlocked but actually ajar. In a second I was through, and had my right knee and shoulder against a hall door which was visibly opening inward. My pressure took the opener off guard, for the thing shut as I pushed, so that I could slip the well-conditioned bolt as I had done with the other door. As I gained this respite I heard the battering at the two other doors abate, while a confused clatter came from the connecting door I had shielded with the bedstead. Evidently the bulk of my assailants had entered the southerly room and were massing in a lateral attack. But at the same moment a pass key sounded in the next door to the north, and I knew that a nearer peril was at hand.

The northward connecting door was wide open, but there was no time to think about checking the already turning lock in the hall. All I could do was to shut and bolt the open connecting door, as well as its mate on the opposite side—pushing a bedstead against the one and a bureau against the other, and moving a washstand in front of the hall door. I must, I saw, trust to such makeshift barriers to shield me till I could get out the window and on the roof of the Paine Street block. But even in this acute moment my chief horror

was something apart from the immediate weakness of my defenses. I was shuddering because not one of my pursuers, despite some hideous pantings, gruntings, and subdued barkings at odd intervals, was uttering an intelligible vocal sound!

As I moved the furniture and rushed toward the windows I heard a frightful scurrying along the corridor toward the room north of me, and perceived that the southward battering had ceased. Plainly, most of my opponents were about to concentrate against the feeble connecting door which they knew must open directly on me. Outside, the moon played on the ridgepole of the block below, and I saw that the jump would be desperately hazardous because of the steep surface on which I must land.

The clatter at the northerly connecting door was now terrific, and I saw that the weak panelling was beginning to splinter. Obviously, the besiegers had brought some ponderous object into play as a battering-ram. The bedstead, however, still held firm; so that I had at least a faint chance of making good my escape. As I opened the window I noticed that it was flanked by heavy velour draperies suspended from a pole by brass rings, and also that there was a large projecting catch for the shutters on the exterior. Seeing a possible means of avoiding the dangerous jump, I yanked at the hangings and brought them down, pole and all; then quickly hooking two of the rings in the shutter catch and flinging the drapery outside. The heavy folds reached fully to the abutting roof, and I saw that the rings and catch would be likely to bear my weight. So, climbing out of the window and down the improvised rope ladder, I left behind me forever the morbid and horror-infested fabric of the Gilman House.

I landed safely on the loose slates of the steep roof, and succeeded in gaining the gaping black skylight without a slip. The place inside was ghoulish-looking, but I was past minding such impressions and made at once for the staircase revealed by my flashlight—after a hasty glance at my watch, which showed the hour to be 2 A.M. The steps creaked, but seemed tolerably sound; and I raced down past a barnlike second story to the ground floor. The desolation was complete, and only echoes answered my footfalls.

The hallway inside was black, and when I reached the opposite end I saw that the street door was wedged immovably shut. Resolved to try another building, I groped my way toward the courtyard, but stopped short when close to the doorway.

For out of an opened door in the Gilman House a large crowd of doubtful shapes was pouring — lanterns bobbing in the darkness, and horrible croaking voices exchanging low cries in what was certainly not English. Their features were indistinguishable, but their crouching, shambling gait was abominably repellent. And worst of all, I perceived that one figure was strangely robed, and unmistakably surmounted by a tall tiara of a design altogether too familiar. Again groping toward the street, I opened a door off the hall and came upon an empty room with closely shuttered but sashless windows. Fumbling in the rays of my flashlight, I found I could open the shutters; and in another moment had climbed outside and was carefully closing the aperture in its original manner.

I walked rapidly, softly, and close to the ruined houses. At Bates Street I drew into a yawning vestibule while two shambling figures crossed in front of me, but was soon on my way again and approaching the open space where Eliot Street obliquely crosses Washington at the intersection of South. Though I had never seen this space, it had looked dangerous to me on the grocery youth's map; since the moonlight would have free play there. There was no use trying to evade it, for

any alternative course would involve detours of possibly disastrous visibility and delaying effect. The only thing to do was to cross it boldly and openly; imitating the typical shamble of the Innsmouth folk as best I could, and trusting that no one—or at least no pursuer of mine—would be there.

Just how fully the pursuit was organized—and indeed, just what its purpose might be—I could form no idea. There seemed to be unusual activity in the town, but I judged that the news of my escape from the Gilman had not yet spread. The open space was, as I had expected, strongly moonlit. But my progress was unimpeded, and no fresh sound arose to hint that I had been spied. Glancing about me, I involuntarily let my pace slacken for a second to take in the sight of the sea, gorgeous in the burning moonlight at the street's end. Far out beyond the breakwater was the dim, dark line of Devil Reef.

Then, without warning, I saw the intermittent flashes of light on the distant reef. My muscles tightened for panic flight, held in only by a certain unconscious caution and half-hypnotic fascination. And to make matters worse, there now flashed forth from the lofty cupola of the Gilman House, which loomed up to the northeast behind me, a series of analogous though differently spaced gleams which could be nothing less than an answering signal.

I now bent to the left around the ruinous green; still gazing toward the ocean as it blazed in the spectral summer moonlight, and watching the cryptical flashing of those nameless, unexplainable beacons.

It was then that the most horrible impression of all was borne in upon me—the impression which destroyed my last vestige of self-control and sent me running frantically southward past the yawning black doorways and fishily staring windows of that deserted nightmare street. For at a closer glance I saw that the moonlit waters between the reef and the shore were far from empty. They were alive with a teeming horde of shapes swimming inward toward the town!

My frantic running ceased before I had covered a block, for at my left I began to hear something like the hue and cry of organized pursuit. There were footsteps and guttural sounds, and a rattling motor wheezed south along Federal Street. In a second all my plans were utterly changed—for if the southward highway were blocked ahead of me, I must clearly find another egress from Innsmouth. I paused and drew into a gaping doorway, reflecting how lucky I was to have left the moonlit open space before these pursuers came down the parallel street.

Then I thought of the abandoned railway to Rowley, whose solid line of ballasted, weed-grown earth still stretched off to the northwest from the crumbling station on the edge of the river gorge. There was just a chance that the townsfolk would not think of that!

Drawing inside the hall of my deserted shelter, I once more consulted the grocery boy's map with the aid of the flashlight. The immediate problem was how to reach the ancient railway; and I now saw that the safest course was ahead to Babson Street, then west to Lafayette—there edging around but not crossing an open space homologous to the one I had traversed—and subsequently back northward and westward in zigzagging line through Lafayette, Bates, Adams, and Banks Streets—the latter skirting the river gorge—to the abandoned and dilapidated station I had seen from my window. My reason for going ahead to Babson was that I wished neither to re-cross the earlier open space nor to begin my westward course along a cross street as broad as South. I crossed the street to the right-hand side in order to edge around into Babson as inconspicuously as possible.

In Babson Street I clung as closely as possible to the sagging, uneven buildings; twice pausing in a doorway as the noises behind me momentarily increased. The open space ahead shone wide and desolate under the moon, but my route would not force me to cross it. During my second pausé I began to detect a fresh distribution of the vague sounds; and upon looking cautiously out from cover beheld a motor car darting across the open space, bound outward along Eliot Street.

As I watched—choked by a sudden rise in the fishy odor after a short abatement—I saw a band of uncouth, crouching shapes loping and shambling in the same direction; and knew that this must be the party guarding the Ipswich road, since that highway forms an extension of Eliot Street. Two of the figures I glimpsed were in voluminous robes, and one wore a peaked diadem which glistened whitely in the moonlight. The gait of this figure was so odd that it sent a chill through me—for it seemed to me the creature was almost *hopping*.

When the last of the band was out of sight I resumed my progress; darting around the corner into Lafayette Street, and crossing Eliot very hurriedly lest stragglers of the party be still advancing along that thoroughfare. I did hear some croaking and clattering sounds far off toward Town Square, but accomplished the passage without disaster. My greatest dread was in recrossing broad and moonlit South Street—with its seaward view—and I had to nerve myself for the ordeal. Someone might easily be looking, and possible Eliot Street stragglers could not fail to glimpse me from either of two points. At the last moment I decided I had better slacken my trot and make the crossing as before in the shambling gait of an average Innsmouth native.

I had not quite crossed the street when I heard a muttering band advancing along Washington from the north. As they reached the broad open space where I had had my first disquieting glimpse of the moonlit water I could see them plainly only a block away—and was horrified by the bestial abnormality of their faces and the dog-like sub-humanness of their crouching gait. One man moved in a positively simian way, with long arms frequently touching the ground; while another figure—robed and tiaraed—seemed to progress in an almost hopping fashion. I judged this party to be the one I had seen in the Gilman's courtyard—the one, therefore, most closely on my trail. As some of the figures turned to look in my direction I was transfixed with fright, yet managed to preserve the casual, shambling gait I had assumed. To this day I do not know whether they saw me or not. If they did, my stratagem must have deceived them, for they passed on across the moonlit space without varying their course—meanwhile croaking and jabbering in some hateful guttural patois I could not identify.

Once more in shadow, I resumed my former dog-trot past the leaning and decrepit houses that stared blankly into the night. Having crossed to the western sidewalk I rounded the nearest corner into Bates Street, where I kept close to the buildings on the southern side. At last I saw the ancient arcaded station—or what was left of it—and made directly for the tracks that started from its farther end.

The rails were rusty but mainly intact, and not more than half the ties had rotted away. Walking or running on such a surface was very difficult; but I did my best, and on the whole made very fair time. For some distance the line kept on along the gorge's brink, but at length I reached the long covered bridge where it crossed the chasm at a dizzy height. The condition of this bridge would determine my next step. If humanly possible, I would use it; if not, I would have to risk more street

wandering and take the nearest intact highway bridge.

The vast, barnlike length of the old bridge gleamed spectrally in the moonlight and I saw that the ties were safe for at least a few feet within. Entering, I began to use my flashlight, and was almost knocked down by the cloud of bats that flapped past me. About halfway across there was a perilous gap in the ties which I feared for a moment would halt me; but in the end I risked a desperate jump which fortunately succeeded.

I was glad to see the moonlight again when I emerged from that macabre tunnel. The old tracks crossed River Street at a grade, and at once veered off into a region increasingly rural and with less and less of Innsmouth's abhorrent fishy odor. Here the dense growth of weeds and briers hindered me and cruelly tore my clothes, but I was none the less glad that they were there to give me concealment in case of peril. I knew that much of my route must be visible from the Rowley road.

The marshy region began very shortly, with the single track on a low, grassy embankment. Then came a sort of island of higher ground, where the line passed through a shallow open cut choked with bushes and brambles. I was very glad of this partial shelter, since at this point the Rowley road was uncomfortably near according to my window view.

Just before entering the cut I glanced behind me, but saw no pursuer. The ancient spires and roofs of decaying Innsmouth gleamed lovely and ethereal in the magic yellow moonlight, and I thought of how they must have looked in the old days before the shadow fell. Then, as my gaze circled inland from the town, something less tranquil arrested my notice and held me immobile for a second.

What I saw—or fancied I saw—was a disturbing suggestion of undulant motion far to the south; a suggestion which made me conclude that a very large horde must be pouring out of the city along the level Ipswich road. The distance was great, and I could distinguish nothing in detail; but I did not at all like the look of that moving column.

All sorts of unpleasant conjectures crossed my mind. I thought of those very extreme Innsmouth types said to be hidden in crumbling, centuried warrens near the waterfront. I thought, too, of those nameless swimmers I had seen. Counting the parties so far glimpsed, as well as those presumably covering other roads, the number of my pursuers must be strangely large for a town as depopulated as Innsmouth.

Who were they? Why were they here? And if such a column of them was scouring the Ipswich road, would the patrols on the other roads be likewise augmented?

I had entered the brush-grown cut and was struggling along at a very slow pace when that damnable fishy odor again waxed dominant. There were sounds, too —a kind of wholesale, colossal flopping or pattering which somehow called up images of the most detestable sort.

And then both stench and sounds grew stronger, so that I paused shivering and grateful for the cut's protection. It was here, I recalled, that the Rowley road drew so close to the old railway before crossing westward and diverging. Something was coming along that road, and I must lie low till its passage and vanishment in the distance. Crouched in the bushes of that sandy cleft I felt reasonably safe, even though I knew the searchers would have to cross the track in front of me not much more than a hundred yards away. I would be able to see them, but they could not, except by a malign miracle, see me.

All at once I began dreading to look at them as they passed. I saw the close moonlit space where they would surge by, and had curious thoughts about the irredeemable pollution of that space. They

would perhaps be the worst of all Innsmouth types—something one would not care to remember.

The stench waxed overpowering, and the noises swelled to a bestial babel of croaking, baying, and barking, without the least suggestion of human speech. Were these indeed the voices of my pursuers? That flopping or pattering was monstrous—I could not look upon the degenerate creatures responsible for it. I would keep my eyes shut till the sounds receded toward the west. The horde was very close now—the air foul with their hoarse snarlings, and the ground almost shaking with their alien-rhythmed footfalls. My breath nearly ceased to come, and I put every ounce of will-power into the task of holding my eyelids down.

I am not even yet willing to say whether what followed was a hideous actuality or only a nightmare hallucination. The later action of the government, after my frantic appeals, would tend to confirm it as a monstrous truth; but could not an hallucination have been repeated under the quasi-hypnotic spell of that ancient, haunted, and shadowed town?

But I must try to tell what I thought I saw that night under the mocking yellow moon—saw surging and hopping down the Rowley road in plain sight in front of me as I crouched among the wild brambles of that desolate railway cut. Of course my resolution to keep my eyes shut had failed. It was foredoomed to failure—for who could crouch blindly while a legion of croaking, baying entities of unknown source flopped noisomely past, scarcely more than a hundred yards away?

For I knew that a long section of them must be plainly in sight where the sides of the cut flattened out and the road crossed the track—and I could no longer keep myself from sampling whatever horror that leering yellow moon might have to show.

It was the end, for whatever remains to me of life on the surface of this earth, of every vestige of mental peace and confidence in the integrity of nature and of the human mind. Can it be possible that this planet has actually spawned such things; that human eyes have truly seen, as objective flesh, what man has hitherto known only in febrile phantasy and tenuous legend?

And yet I saw them in a limitless stream—flopping, hopping, croaking, bleating—surging inhumanly through the spectral moonlight in a grotesque, malignant saraband of fantastic nightmare. And some of them had tall tiaras of that nameless whitish-gold metal . . . and some were strangely robed . . . and one, who led the way, was clad in a ghoulishly humped black coat and striped trousers, and had a man's felt hat perched on the shapeless thing that answered for a head. . . .

I think their predominant color was a grayish-green, though they had white bellies. They were mostly shiny and slippery, but the ridges of their backs were scaly. Their forms vaguely suggested the anthropoid, while their heads were the heads of fish, with prodigious bulging eyes that never closed. At the sides of their necks were palpitating gills, and their long paws were webbed. They hopped irregularly, sometimes on two legs and sometimes on four. I was somehow glad that they had no more than four limbs. Their croaking, baying voices, clearly used for articulate speech, held all the dark shades of expression which their staring faces lacked.

But for all of their monstrousness they were not unfamiliar to me. I knew too well what they must be—for was not the memory of that evil tiara at Newburyport still fresh? They were the blasphemous fish-frogs of the nameless design—living and horrible—and as I saw them I knew also of what that humped, tiaraed priest in the black church basement had so fearsomely reminded me. Their number was

past guessing. It seemed to me that there were limitless swarms of them—and certainly my momentary glimpse could have shown only the least fraction. In another instant everything was blotted out by a merciful fit of fainting; the first I had ever had.

V

IT WAS a gentle daylight rain that awaked me from my stupor in the brush-grown railway cut, and when I staggered out to the roadway ahead I saw no trace of any prints in the fresh mud. Innsmouth's ruined roofs and toppling steeples loomed up grayly toward the southeast, but not a living creature did I spy in all the desolate salt marshes around. My watch was still going, and told me that the hour was past noon.

The reality of what I had been through was highly uncertain in my mind, but I felt that something hideous lay in the background. I must get away from evil-shadowed Innsmouth—and accordingly I began to test my cramped, wearied powers of locomotion. Despite weakness, hunger, horror, and bewilderment I found myself after a time able to walk; so started slowly along the muddy road to Rowley. Before evening I was in the village, getting a meal and providing myself with presentable clothes. I caught the night train to Arkham, and the next day talked long and earnestly with government officials there; a process I later repeated in Boston. With the main result of these colloquies the public is now familiar—and I wish, for normality's sake, there were nothing more to tell. Perhaps it is madness that is overtaking me—yet perhaps a greater horror—or a greater marvel—is reaching out.

I dared not look for that piece of strange jewelry said to be in the Miskatonic University Museum. I did, however, improve my stay in Arkham by collecting some genealogical notes I had long wished to possess; very rough and hasty data, it is true, but capable of good use later on when I might have time to collate and codify them. The curator of the historical society there—Mr. E. Lapham Peabody—was very courteous about assisting me, and expressed unusual interest when I told him I was a grandson of Eliza Orne of Arkham, who was born in 1867 and had married James Williamson of Ohio at the age of seventeen.

It seemed that a maternal uncle of mine had been there many years before on a quest much like my own; and that my grandmother's family was a topic of some local curiosity. There had, Mr. Peabody said, been considerable discussion about the marriage of her father, Benjamin Orne, just after the Civil War; since the ancestry of the bride was peculiarly puzzling. That bride was understood to have been an orphaned Marsh of New Hampshire — a cousin of the Essex County Marshes—but her education had been in France and she knew very little of her family. A guardian had deposited funds in a Boston bank to maintain her and her French governess; but that guardian's name was unfamiliar to Arkham people, and in time he dropped out of sight, so that the governess assumed his role by court appointment. The Frenchwoman—now long dead—was very taciturn, and there were those who said she could have told more than she did.

But the most baffling thing was the inability of anyone to place the recorded parents of the young woman — Enoch and Lydia (Meserve) Marsh — among the known families of New Hampshire. Possibly, many suggested, she was the natural daughter of some Marsh of prominence—she certainly had the true Marsh eyes. Most of the puzzling was done after her early death, which took place at the birth of my grandmother—her only child. Having formed some disagreeable impressions con-

nected with the name of Marsh, I did not welcome the news that it belonged on my own ancestral tree; nor was I pleased by Mr. Peabody's suggestion that I had the true Marsh eyes myself. However, I was grateful for data which I knew would prove valuable; and took copious notes and lists of book references regarding the well-documented Orne family.

I went directly home to Toledo from Boston, and later spent a month at Maumee recuperating from my ordeal. In September I entered Oberlin for my final year, and from then till the next June was busy with studies and other wholesome activities—reminded of the bygone terror only by occasional official visits from government men in connection with the campaign which my pleas and evidence had started. Around the middle of July—just a year after the Innsmouth experience—I spent a week with my late mother's family in Cleveland; checking some of my new genealogical data with the various notes, traditions, and bits of heirloom material in existence there, and seeing what kind of a connected chart I could construct.

I did not exactly relish this task, for the atmosphere of the Williamson home had always depressed me. There was a strain of morbidity there, and my mother had never encouraged my visiting her parents as a child, although she always welcomed her father when he came to Toledo. My Arkham-born grandmother had seemed strange and almost terrifying to me, and I do not think I grieved when she disappeared. I was eight years old then, and it was said that she had wandered off in grief after the suicide of my uncle Douglas, her eldest son. He had shot himself after a trip to New England—the same trip, no doubt, which had caused him to be recalled at the Arkham Historical Society.

This uncle had resembled her, and I had never liked him either. Something about the staring, unwinking expression of both of them had given me a vague, unaccountable uneasiness. My mother and uncle Walter had not looked like that. They were like their father, though poor little cousin Lawrence—Walter's son—had been an almost perfect duplicate of his grandmother before his condition took him to the premanent seclusion of a sanitarium at Canton. I had not seen him in four years, but my uncle once implied that his state, both mental and physical, was very bad. This worry had probably been a major cause of his mother's death two years before.

My grandfather and his widowered son Walter now comprised the Cleveland household, but the memory of older times hung thickly over it. I still disliked the place, and tried to get my researches done as quickly as possible. Williamson records and traditions were supplied in abundance by my grandfather; though for Orne material I had to depend on my uncle Walter, who put at my disposal the contents of all his files, including notes, letters, cuttings, heirlooms, photographs, and miniatures.

It was in going over the letters and pictures on the Orne side that I began to acquire a kind of terror of my own ancestry. As I have said, my grandmother and uncle Douglas had always disturbed me. Now, years after their passing, I gazed at their pictured faces with a measureably heightened feeling of repulsion and alienation. I could not at first understand the change, but gradually a horrible sort of *comparison* began to obtrude itself on my unconscious mind despite the steady refusal of my consciousness to admit even the least suspicion of it. It was clear that the typical expression of these faces now suggested something it had not suggested before—something which would bring stark panic if too openly thought of.

But the worst shock came when my uncle showed me the Orne jewelry in a

downtown safe-deposit vault. Some of the items were delicate and inspiring enough, but there was one box of strange old pieces descended from my mysterious great-grandmother which my uncle was almost reluctant to produce. They were, he said, of very grotesque and almost repulsive design.

As my uncle began slowly and grudgingly to unwrap the things, he urged me not to be shocked by the strangeness and frequent hideousness of the designs. There were two armlets, a tiara, and a kind of pectoral; the latter having in high relief certain figures of almost unbearable extravagance.

He seemed to expect some demonstration when the first piece—the tiara—became visible, but I doubt if he expected quite what actually happened. I did not expect it, either, for I thought I was thoroughly forewarned regarding what the jewelry would turn out to be. What I did was to faint silently away just as I had done in that brier-choked railway cut a year before.

From that day on my life has been a nightmare of brooding and apprehension, nor do I know how much is hideous truth and how much madness. My great-grandmother had been a Marsh of unknown source whose husband lived in Arkham—and did not old Zadok say that the daughter of Obed Marsh by a monstrous mother was married to an Arkham man through a trick? What was it the ancient toper had muttered about the likeness of my eyes to Captain Obed's? In Arkham, too, the curator had told me I had the true Marsh eyes. Was Obed Marsh my own great-great-grandfather? Who—or *what*—then, was my great-great-grandmother? But perhaps this was all madness. Those whitish-gold ornaments might easily have been bought from some Innsmouth sailor by the father of my great-grandmother, whoever he was. And that look in the staring-eyed faces of my grandmother and self-slain uncle might be sheer fancy, bolstered up by the Innsmouth shadow which had so darkly colored my imagination. But why had my uncle killed himself after an ancestral quest in New England?

For more than two years I fought off these reflections with partial success. My father secured me a place in an insurance office, and I buried myself in routine as deeply as possible. In the winter of 1930-31, however, the dreams began. They were very sparse and insidious at first, but increased in frequency and vividness as the weeks went by. Great watery spaces opened out before me, and I seemed to wander through titanic sunken porticos and labyrinths of weedy cyclopean walls and grotesque fishes as my companions. Then the *other shapes* began to appear, filling me with nameless horror the moment I awoke. But during the dreams they did not horrify me at all—I was one with them; wearing their unhuman trappings, treading their aqueous ways, and praying monstrously at their evil sea-bottom temples.

There was much more than I could remember, but even what I did remember each morning would be enough to stamp me as a madman or a genius if ever I dared write it down. Some frightful influence, I felt, was seeking gradually to drag me out of the sane world of wholesome life into unnameable abysses of blackness and alienage; and the process told heavily on me. My health and appearance grew steadily worse, till finally I was forced to give up my position and adopt the static, secluded life of an invalid. Some odd nervous affliction had me in its grip, and I found myself at times almost unable to shut my eyes.

It was then that I began to study the mirror with mounting alarm. The slow ravages of disease are not pleasant to watch, but in my case there was something subtler and more puzzling in the background. My father seemed to notice it, too, for he began looking at me curiously and almost affright-

edly. What was taking place in me? Could it be that I was coming to resemble my grandmother and uncle Douglas?

One night I had a frightful dream in which I met my grandmother under the sea. She lived in a phosphorescent palace of many terraces, with gardens of strange leprous corals and grotesque brachiate efflorescences, and welcomed me with a warmth that may have been sardonic. She had changed—as those who take to the water change—and told me she had never died. Instead, she had gone to a spot her dead son had learned about, and had leaped to a realm whose wonders—destined for him as well—he had spurned with a smoking pistol. This was to be my realm, too—I could not escape it. I would never die, but would live with those who had lived since before man ever walked the earth.

I met also that which had been her grandmother. For eighty thousand years Pth'thya-l'yi had lived in Y'ha-nthlei, and thither she had gone back after Obed Marsh was dead. Y'ha-nthlei was not destroyed when the upper-earth men shot death into the sea. It was hurt, but not destroyed. The Deep Ones could never be destroyed, even though the palaeogean magic of the forgotten Old Ones might sometimes check them. For the present they would rest; but some day, if they remembered, they would rise again for the tribute Great Cthulhu craved. It would be a city greater than Innsmouth next time. They had planned to spread, and had brought up that which would help them, but now they must wait once more. For bringing the upper-earth men's death I must do a penance, but that would not be heavy. This was the dream in which I saw a *shoggoth* for the first time, and the sight set me awake in a frenzy of screaming. That morning the mirror definitely told me I had acquired *the Innsmouth look.*

So far I have not shot myself as my uncle Douglas did. I bought an automatic and almost took the step, but certain dreams deterred me. The tense extremes of horror are lessening, and I feel queerly drawn toward the unknown sea-deeps instead of fearing them. I hear and do strange things in sleep, and awake with a kind of exaltation instead of terror. I do not believe I need to wait for the full change as most have waited. If I did, my father would probably shut me up in a sanitarium as my poor little cousin is shut up. Stupendous and unheard-of splendors await me below, and I shall seek them soon. *Iä-R'lyeh! Cthulhu fhtagn! Iä! Iä!* No, I shall not shoot myself—I cannot be made to shoot myself!

I shall plan my cousin's escape from that Canton madhouse, and together we shall go to marvel-shadowed Innsmouth. We shall swim out to that brooding reef in the sea and dive down through black abysses to cyclopean and many-columned Y'ha-nthlei, and in that lair of the Deep Ones we shall dwell amidst wonder and glory forever.

The White Lady

By DOROTHY QUICK

The two lovers had concocted a white lie—about a White Lady who walked the narrow hall, and haunted Tall Trees when a Vetrell had been wronged . . . and yet, there was more than a little truth to the whole yarn!

"MARY VETRELL," he said, his dark, malevolent eyes flashing, "I want your answer."

The girl looked into his crafty face. It had power, and one glance was enough to know he would stop at nothing to gain his ends. His figure was dark and sinister against the linen fold panelling. He was taller than Mary—a good six feet, which seemed even more due to the long black robes he wore. He was all dark—hair, eyes, under thick black brows which met over his nose. His skin was sallow, and craft had etched deep lines beside his narrow, cruel mouth. He was handsome in an evil way, and, without the churchly robes and tonsure, might have been a fine figure of a man. The only touch of color about him flashed from the jewels in the huge cross he wore suspended from a gold chain about his neck and the ring on his finger, which was a ruby heavily mounted in gold.

Mary Vetrell was afraid of him. Fear flowed through her like angry waters, but she held her head high and let no trace of it show.

If the man was dark Mary was light itself. She was tall and slim with all the grace of a young willow tree. Her eyes, brown with little golden flecks in them, under straight brows with heavy lashes, looked calmly at the man who threatened her. She had a mobile face, exceedingly lovely. Her hair was a deep bronze—what little could be seen under her coif, which was of the type Holbein painted. She wore a rose-colored gown over an underdress of heavy green satin. The stiff skirts billowed away from her slender waist which was encircled by a gold girdle. The low cut square neck of her dress was outlined in gold thread and the glint of emeralds shone from the embroidery, of which there were also touches on the sleeves.

Her hand picked at the rose-colored velvet nervously as she answered in a calm and steady voice that betrayed none of the havoc her emotions were in.

"My lord Abbot, my answer is plain and short, though I have been long in giving it, who weighed its cost." She drew herself up to her full height so her eyes were almost on a level with those in the saturnine face opposite hers, and shot the word at him as though it were an arrow from a bow. "No!"

"So—my nephew is not good enough for a Vetrell," snarled the Abbot. "Listen, girl, in Spain where we Telvas come from, the Telva name is a key that opens all doors at Court, and Clement has not only Telva blood from my sister, but D'Aigula blood from his father. In Spain those two names mean much—not only in Spain, but here—as you will find, lady, unless you

"The Abbott shrieked and ran from the hall, the black skirt of his cassock flapping around his legs like a raven's wing!"

send a better answer to my nephew Clement's suit."

"My Lord Abbot, I never questioned Clement's high lineage, but I can send no other answer to a man I do not love."

The man threw back his head and laughed.

"Love! Is that all? Love will come after mating—trust my nephew for that."

"I am no Spanish girl who sits cloistered

until she is given to a man of her father's choice. I am Mary Vetrell, daughter of Sir Charles Vetrell of Tall Trees, and we Vetrell women have the right to choose our own husbands. It is so written in the Vetrell deed for Tall Trees and those acres you would join to the Abbey—that deed which William the Conqueror gave to the Charles de Vetrell who helped him win this island, and to his Anne, who saved the King's life and asked this boon as her reward. She loved her father's clerk, and when the King put in the deed that Vetrell women could be wedded as they would, she married her love and was truly happy. As I shall be, Lord Abbot, when I take me a husband of my own choosing." She emphasized "my" so that Telva could not doubt her intention.

"And have you made your choice, daughter?" Once more the Abbot's tones were smooth.

MARY hesitated. What should she do? She *had* made her choice—of that there had been no doubt in her mind since her childhood playmate, John de Winton, had come back from the foreign wars as Sir John de Winton — an honor gained from his bravery in the field. She had loved him as a child, as a long, lanky boy before he sailed for France, and now she loved him as a man. But although she loved him, and he rode from Winton Castle each day to Tall Trees and spent much of his time beside her, he had said no word of love.

The Abbot stirred and Mary, throwing caution to the winds, told the truth—and a lie.

"I have, my father—of a truth I have made my choice, and ere the winter comes John de Winton and I will beg your services to make us one—"

"Though you come on your knees I will refuse."

"There are other priests in England."

"Ay—and other Kings than William the Conqueror. What one monarch gives another can take away. King Henry has been ever gracious to me, and Queen Katherine is a true daughter of the Church. You would do well to let me choose your husband." His words were soft but there was sharp steel under the velvet.

"I am sorry, but my heart has already chosen. Nor do I think the King would greatly care whether I wed Clement D'Aigula or John de Winton."

She had struck back, but the Abbot merely smiled.

"Queen Katherine would. She likes to see her countrymen advanced. I swear to you I will get the King's ear, and chop your Tall Trees down if need be unless you'll be my nephew's bride."

"Lord Abbot, let us cease fencing. You are no Cupid, nor, do I think, does Clement love me so greatly. He has position, as you say, so that marrying a Vetrell is a step down for him, not up. Surely he cannot need wealth, or if he did, he'd look to other maidens. Then why are you so strait with me, whom up till now you have been fond of?"

"I like your honest fearlessness. I always have since the day I took the fish hook from your hand. You were a child then, yet you did not whimper, though I hurt you sore. I have given you of my poor fund of knowledge — writing and Latin—at your father's wish, and, as you say, I have been fond of you—fonder than you guess." His voice faltered, then went on. "In fact my dream has ever been to dance your children at my knee. I sent for Clement to come here from Spain because I thought you'd make a good wife for him—far better than any of those women at Philip's court who tried to capture him. And, as I had foreseen, he loved you greatly—though you do not think it. He is of my own blood and, 'fore my God, I'd rather have you dead than wed to any other—"

"You still don't tell me why." Mary swayed a little as she stood.

"I'd rather have you dead than wed to any other," he had said, but he had not gone on speaking the thoughts that coursed through his brain. "I love you. I cannot wed you, who am wedded to the Church, nor would I take you otherways, but if you are married to my nephew you become almost my own. Your children will have Telva blood in them and be part mine on that account, so I can be content, for you'll be in my life for always. But if you wed another I should lose you. I could not suffer that."

To Mary he was a man who, up till now, she had thought of as her spiritual father, and for whom she had cherished a certain affection.

Today he had come to her from Sir Charles in a temper, though she now knew it must have been because her father refused to bend her will, she still resented it, and his obvious desire to wed her to Clement, who was a younger version of his uncle, and attracted her not at all.

At last the Abbot replied to her.

"Mary Vetrell, I have told you why. My nephew is dear to me as my own self. He loves you, so he must have you—and have you he will, for I'll see to it. As Tall Trees' acres join the Abbey lands, so shall you two be united."

"Perhaps there sits the reason. I have heard the Abbey lands are no longer fertile, which have been over-tilled, so Tall Trees' fields are coveted. Well, buy them of my father, if you will—but not through me." Mary's eyes flashed; she had forgotten the lie she had told.

"I care not for the land, though it is true the Abbey needs fields to grow grain, but my nephew has promised if he wed you that he will bide in England. That means much to me." The Abbot's fingers played with his cross. "Mary, I beg you—think again."

"I have thought. My answer is the same."

"Then," now the black eyes truly flashed," I say the King shall hear and, too, I say that you and John de Winton may not wed, for I'll not say the rites, nor any other priest that you may find. In matters of the Church I stand supreme, and till the King decides the right of this you must rest as you are, and I shall pray, daughter, that God will soften your heart toward that poor boy Clement who spends his days in longing for you. I go now, but I shall come again. Take counsel, Mary Vetrell, with yourself and with your father. Nay," as she bowed her head, "today I have no blessing for one who disobeys her holy Father's commands."

He turned on his heel and went out the door without a backward glance. Presently Mary heard a clatter in the courtyard and knew that the Abbot was mounting the snow white mule he always rode. Then came the noise of hoofs and the Abbot Telva, escorted by his men-at-arms, left Tall Trees.

Mary sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands. Through her slim fingers tears fell spattering unheeded on the green satin. It was no light thing in those days to defy the Church, and Mary knew it.

A FIRM step sounded near her and a strong, mellow voice cried in her ear. "Zounds, Mistress Mary, are we to play peek-a-boo?" Firm fingers tugged at hers playfully, but when her face was revealed, the voice changed and became full of sympathy. "How, now, Mistress, has that Spanish knave upset you? If so, I'll wish I'd ridden him off that fancy mule of his."

Mary looked up into a typical English face.

"John," she whispered. "John," while the tears raced down her cheeks.

John de Winton had a clean-cut open

countenance with steady blue eyes. He was gentle and kind, but there was a stubbornness about his well shaped mouth that showed he would be hard to rouse, but ill to cross once he had been. His hair, yellow as corn, was cut square across his forehead and hung to his shoulders Dutch fashion. He had a great chest and arms, with a figure to match, and was the type of man that women love.

Now seeing Mary's tears, his brows tightened. Then suddenly he caught her in his arms, pulled her up, and began kissing away the tears.

"I cannot bear to see you weep, my love," he murmured between kisses.

It was well he held her firmly or Mary would have fallen with the shock. For a few minutes she leaned against him, her heart beating rapidly, and then she raised her head. As it chanced—or perhaps it wasn't chance—when she moved it was just enough so that John's lips, instead of touching her cheek, found her mouth.

IT WAS as if two souls met, mingled, and became one in that brief moment. When they finally drew apart he did not say, "I love you"—nor did she. It was not necessary. Enough had already been said for all eternity.

Mary's tears were gone and John's face was utterly content.

"If I had not wept," Mary laughed, "perhaps you would have gone on being silent forever."

"And so I might, who feared you did not love me."

"Oh, John, I have loved you all my life, I think, and often wondered why you did not speak, for I was sure you cared. Now I am grateful that the Abbot made me cry."

"When I saw you unhappy it was as though a force took me without my own volition, giving me the courage that I lacked. Quite suddenly I found you in my arms where you must ever rest. Mary, when will we be wed?"

"Never, if the Abbot has his way. Listen, my love." Mary drew John to the window seat and there, sitting close beside him, her hand in his, she told all the story of her interview with Abbot Telva.

John did not interrupt her. When she finished his face was grave.

"Here is a sum whose solution is difficult to find. Our case is hard. The Abbot will not wed us, nor suffer his priests to do so. To come by one who would do it without his sanction, as we are in his See, is nigh impossible. Yet, wed we will, and soon. It must be soon. I like not that Abbot, nor his dark-eyed nephew. In truth that same Clement has haunted my dreams of late, for I feared you liked him more than you liked me."

"Foolish!" Mary rewarded him for his folly with the first kiss of her own bestowing.

A hearty laugh parted them. The perfect counterpart for Santa Claus stood in the doorway. Big, bluff and burly, Sir Charles Vetrell had the same cast of features as his daughter. Different though they were, the relationship between them was unmistakable. His snow white hair aureoled his benign countenance and he smiled with his entire face.

"So, daughter, I made no mistake when I told the Abbot you would choose your own mate—and you have chosen well. I, myself could not have done better. John always has seemed like my own son, and I had no stomach for that Spanish whelp, though I'd have been civil if you had taken him." His laughter sounded like the distant rumble of thunder. "But 'tis well you spared my disposition the strain, my child. Come hither, both of you, and have my blessing."

Hand in hand they knelt before him as he gave it, and when they looked up there were tears in his eyes. He wiped

them away with the back of his hand.

"I hope you will not take her too soon, my son, for Tall Trees will be empty and barren without her."

"It looks like we may not be able to wed for a long time, Sir Charles," de Winton spoke gravely.

Once more Mary told her tale.

Sir Charles grew serious. Hoisting his bulk into a chair he said, "This is a sorry matter. There has always been fighting between the Abbey and Tall Trees over the farthest fields. We Vetrells have the right of it, but I'd give up the land for Mary's happiness. But there is more than a matter of land here. The Spaniards know that Katherine is no longer loved by the King. They have heard, as I have heard, that Cardinal Woolsey, who governs the King and England, would pull her down and put a French wife in her place—keeping, of course, the golden dower that came with Katherine, for the sake of which Henry took her when his brother died. Now the Spaniards everywhere in England cement their stance by marrying into the families that count for something here, so when the struggle comes there will be strength behind the Queen. This Abbot Telva came with Katherine and has had much advancement. His Abbey of Chettleworth is one of the most important in the kingdom. He is quite right when he says you'll be hard put to it to wed without his help."

"It is not fair," Mary moaned, but John put his arm about her, and she gave up lamenting to ask, "What can we do?"

"The King is over all, and the Cardinal rules the King," Sir Charles said meditatively. "I know Woolsey. Once I did him a favor before he reached the heights of greatness. I do not think he has forgotten. I will write him a letter and John can ride to Hampton Court with it. I think he'll see justice done and be not overly anxious to favor the Spaniard."

John hit his hand against his knee and exclaimed, "Well planned, Sir Charles. I'll go to Hampton Court this very day, and if Woolsey helps not, I know one of Queen Katherine's maids, Mistress Anne Boleyn, whom I met in France. She might whisper a good word for us into the Queen's ear."

Mary drew back and looked at him very strangely. She was jealous and wondering if this same Anne Boleyn was perhaps the reason why John had delayed speaking of his love.

"It seems you are hasty to leave your new-betrothed, and over-quick to think of another lady," she said coldly, withdrawing her hand.

John caught it back again.

"I only go so I can make you wholly mine, Mary, and I do swear to you that till this instant I had forgotten Mistress Anne, though, in truth, she was very fair." His eyes twinkled.

Mary was about to speak tartly when her father interrupted.

"Peace; this is no time for petty bickerings. Mary knows right well you love her, John, and I hold that your idea of speaking to Mistress Boleyn is good, although if you do, you must ask her to whisper in the King's ear — not the Queen's! For it seems of late the King has found Anne Boleyn 'very fair'. John, you will walk a dangerous path at Court; see that you tread it carefully. Now I will go and write my letter to the Cardinal." Sir Charles heaved himself out of the chair sectionally.

"I ride this very day," John said, and then as Sir Charles neared the door, "would not you and Mary stay at Castle Winton 'til I return? The castle is well fortified in case the Abbot stirs up trouble. My mother would joy to welcome you."

Sir Charles pondered awhile, then nodded.

"A good idea, my boy. We'll keep Lady de Winton company until you re-

turn. I'll bid your woman pack your gear, Mary, so you can bide here 'til we leave. For in the fashion of lovers you and John have much to say."

Then he bustled through the door, and they heard him giving orders for awhile until his voice died away.

"Oh, John, I do not like to see you go to Court. Suppose the Cardinal is not friendly?"

"Fear nothing, Mary. We have two arrows to our bow. By one or the other I'll win you."

He held her close and Mary thrust her jealousy aside, and soon the joy of his kisses made her quite forget that he was going to see Mistress Anne Boleyn—who was "very fair."

A few hours later they were riding to Castle Winton where they were warmly welcomed by John's widowed mother.

Lady de Winton had been practically a second mother to Mary since Sir Charles' wife died giving her birth, so that when John told her he and Mary had at last come to an understanding she was overjoyed. But the other news sobered her.

"I do not like that Abbot, nor his nephew," she said. "The Abbot Telva's demands in tithes for the Abbey are exorbitant, and as for Clement, one of my farm men," she stopped, then went on, "told me he rode for Windsor but an hour ago!"

"To the King! I'd best to horse," John exclaimed.

"Ay, John, and beat the Abbot at his own game!" Sir Charles rumbled.

Lady de Winton bustled about seeing to the packing while John told his body-servant, Godfrey, to make ready and bring the horses. Presently the preparations were complete.

John said farewell, and he and Godfrey rode away.

Mary was very sad. She had only found her love to lose him, and her heart was still greatly troubled over the fairness of Mistress Anne.

Lady de Winton, seeing her downcast, touched her shoulder.

"Nay, Mary, do not grieve. He will come back, and it is well you early learn the first lesson of a woman who loves—that of waiting. So often it is all that we can do. But be of cheer, for of your waiting joy will come, whereas some wait and wait," here she looked at Sir Charles from under heavy eyelashes, "and profit not."

SIR CHARLES started!

"Do you, by any chance, mean, Jane, that you would have listened if I'd—"

A faint smile played around the corners of Lady de Winton's mouth which, despite her forty years, was almost girlish.

"I would have, Charles—and will."

Mary regarded them both with wonder. Lady Jane standing beside her looked calm and beautiful, and Sir Charles suddenly seemed to have shed at least ten of his fifty years.

"Then," he cried, "though I am somewhat large, I still will kneel to ask your hand, for I have loved you a long time, Jane."

"Kneel not. Oh, Charles, you and that boy of mine had such close mouths it took the Abbot to play match-maker. Well, I will come to Tall Trees and keep you from being lonely when Mary is Mistress here. That is—" her dimples showed, "if we've your blessing, child."

"Oh, that you have, and I *am* happy—happier than I ever thought to be," Mary exclaimed.

There followed a general kissing and rejoicing, in the midst of which Sir Charles slapped his thigh resoundingly.

"Now if only John had not gone I could have sent word to the King of our intention to wed, Jane."

Now Lady de Winton's face flushed red.

"I did tell John to mention it to the Cardinal. I thought perhaps with Mary soon to wed you might—"

As Sir Charles took her in his arms she buried her face in his shoulder and Mary quietly stole away to tell her woman where to bestow her things, for she felt she was no longer needed.

She was very happy to think of her father and Lady Jane de Winton being united. Now if only Cardinal Woolsey would override the Abbot everything would be wonderful—almost too wonderful to happen. She was sore afraid, but there was nothing she could do but pray and wait—wait for John to return from Hampton Court. The journey there and back would take at least four days' hard riding, and there was no telling how long he would have to attend the Cardinal before he had an audience—for Woolsey was the honey pot that drew all the flies. Mary sighed. There was truly nothing to do but wait.

The next day nothing happened, except that Sir Charles wrote a note to John telling him that he would soon be his father in three ways—step-father, father-in-law, and father in heart, which indeed he had always been. He bade John tell the Cardinal and ask for King Henry's sanction to the nuptials. This he sent off by one of his own men from Tall Trees.

Of the Abbot they heard nothing, and two more days passed in quiet laziness. Lady de Winton showed Mary all of the Castle, and told her how she ordered things so that Mary would find it easy to take over its complicated management.

"If I only can," Mary murmured, thinking of John and whether the Cardinal would give them dispensation to wed, but Lady de Winton took it she meant that the Castle, being a bigger household than Tall Trees would be difficult to oversee, discoursed for a longer time on how it should be done, and Mary, whose heart was with John, and not in these household matters, had to pay attention.

On the afternoon of the fourth day the Abbot on his white mule came riding to Castle Winton. The Castle's drawbridge was down. In fact there was little use for such things now in England as the times were peaceful and, beginning with the reign of Henry's father, the great Manor Houses, such as Tall Trees, began to replace the fortified and sturdy feudal dwellings.

As the mule clattered into the courtyard, Mary, watching from the leaded windows of the long gallery, wished that time could move back and they could defy the Abbot and the large escort he brought with him.

Mary waited in the long gallery and Sir Charles and Lady de Winton, at her request, stood with her.

THE Abbot paused in the doorway, making the sign of the cross before he entered, then he sat in the tall chair Lady de Winton offered and motioned the others to sit also. This they did, excepting Mary, who stood beside her father regarding Telva closely.

The Abbot of Chettleworth did not meet her glance; instead he addressed her father.

"Sir Charles Vetrell, I formally ask the hand of your daughter Mary for my nephew Clement D'Aigula, though I deem it strange to come to Castle Winton instead of Tall Trees to do so."

"A request you have already made at Tall Trees and which I refused then as I do now. Mary has made her choice—as she's a right to do—and will marry Sir John de Winton." Sir Charles was firm.

"And what say you, Mary Vetrell?" The Abbot's eyes focused on the girl.

"Nothing more nor less than I told you before, my Lord Abbot." This time, however, Mary's tones carried even greater conviction, for she now spoke the truth since John had spoken his heart. She knew

that though her life hinge on the balance she would wed no other.

"Then I have this to tell you. My nephew writes me King Henry gives his consent to his suit and decrees that you and Clement be married in the Abbey of Chettleworth some ten days hence, and furthermore," he raised his hand to still their protests, "the King himself will grace your nuptials, and the Queen also. They go on progress and will stop here for the purpose. Clement rides with them. He bade me give his heart's love to you, Mistress Mary and say only the King could keep him from you, but as the King himself brings him to your arms, he needs must restrain his ardor. For you," here the Abbot again turned his eyes on Sir Charles, "I have a writing. The King's Grace does you much honor for he will lodge at Tall Trees as the Abbey is not large enough to house his retinue. So you must needs return home and make ready."

Sir Charles sighed. Well he knew what entertaining the King meant. The Court would arrive like a bevy of ants to strip him bare. It was an honor—yes, but an expensive one. Still he would have to stomach it as best he could.

"My poor house is ever at His Majesty's disposal, and so am I, but with my daughter it is different. The Vetrell deed—"

The Abbot threw back his head and laughed.

"Cease drooling of the Vetrell deed. Did I not say one King can do away with the foolish deeds of another day? See, I make jingles of it. That's what I think of your Vetrell deed."

"A rhyme for a rhyme, Lord Abbot." Mary was white to her very lips, but she threw her head back like a charger going into battle.

"I'll be Sir John de Winton's wife
Or bravely end this bitter life
Before I share a Spaniard's bed
By my own hand I will be dead."

"No, Mary Vetrel, that you'll not do, for if you do you lose your soul. I here and now pronounce you excommunicate unless you obey the law of the Church. If you take your life no one will give you Christian burial, as you well know."

Mary trembled. It was a dreadful thing he was saying.

He played with his cross. "But that's not yet, child. I forgive your rash words and we'll make an end of rhyming. Get you ready for your nuptials."

Now, Mary, desperate with fear, threw herself on her knees before him. "Oh, Abbot Telva, I pray you, let me wed the man I love. Be again my friend as you have always been—the saintly father I can worship, not the bitter Abbot who lashes me with words that drive me mad. I beg you have some pity on me whose only fault is that I love Sir John." She put her head on his knees and raised her hands in supplication.

He drew her up by them and stood holding her so. "I will be generous. If you will give yourself to God and be a holy nun, I'll put my nephew by and see the King will understand."

"No—no," Mary shrank away, pulling her hands from his grasp, "I could not be a nun—I—"

"Then get ready to wed Clement, for John de Winton's wife you'll never be!" There was hate in the Abbot's face, but the three people in the room only glimpsed it for a moment. Everything happened so quickly that he was gone before anyone had a chance to even answer back. No one followed him for Mary had fainted, and it took the united efforts of Sir Charles and Lady de Winton to bring her to. Finally they were successful but when she had regained consciousness she moaned and sobbed until finally Lady de Winton

had her carried to bed and gave her a sleeping draught to ease her misery. It was the only comfort she could give, for as Clement had been successful John must have failed, and the outlook was black enough.

Later Sir Charles and Lady de Winton puzzled much over it for they could not understand why the Abbot was willing to give over his schemes if Mary entered a convent. They did not know his well-hidden, fanatical love for her, nor how her prayers had moved him, so that he had for the moment been willing to give up his dreams of helping Queen Katherine, his nephew and himself just to know Mary was safe and inviolate. In a convent he could see her and be in truth her spiritual father. That would be almost as good as dancing her children on his knee, or so he had thought in that brief moment. But he had been glad when she refused. When she was Clement's wife, the mother of his child, then he could be content—but only then.

Early the next morning they were all at breakfast when John's man Godfrey came to them weary and travel-stained. He said that John was well and staying at Greenwich where the King held Court, and gave them a letter his master had charged him to deliver.

Lady de Winton bade him go and get meat and drink after his long journey, which he was delighted to do.

WHEN they were alone Sir Charles opened the letter and read it aloud.

"To Sir Charles Vetrell, the Lady Jane de Winton and Mistress Mary Vetrell from John de Winton. Most urgent and private.

"I write these lines myself although my hand is poor, for it is not well that any other eye should see what is set down.

"I have seen Cardinal Woolsey. For love of you, Sir Charles, he has been kind, and, had I reached him before Clement D'Aigula got King Henry's ear, I would have better news to tell you. But as you most likely know by now I was too late. Still all is not lost. The Cardinal is on our side and will favor us, but at the moment dares not do so openly for he wishes no unpleasantness with those of Spanish blood. Mistress Boleyn I have seen and she is much interested and will try to soften the heart that needs to be softened. She bids me be of good cheer and sends her greetings to Mary and looks forward to meeting her. I come to Tall Trees with the Court. I have spoken much of the Vetrell ghost—that White Lady who walks in the narrow hall — how it always haunts Tall Trees when a Vetrell is wronged. The King desires to see the White Lady who, I have told him, resembles Mary—the White Lady who haunted Tall Trees when the third Sir Vetrell tried to go against the Vetrell deed and force his daughter to wed against her will; how, when he gave over and let her wed the man of her choice, as the deed stated, the ghost vanished and was seen no more until the night the Abbot pressed his nephew's suit, when the White Lady walked again. His Majesty is curious to see this visitation, so I hope the White Lady is not shy of royalty.

"Clement D'Aigula is here. I needs must be civil to him, but I'll pick a quarrel and send him to another world before he marries Mary. I still have hope, and send this ring to her who has my heart.

"John de Winton."

And there was a seal marked with the boars of Winton.

"Now I think the boy is mad, or I have

lost my eyes," Sir Charles announced. "For we all know well that Tall Trees has no ghost, no White Lady—nor was there ever question by any Vetrell of disobeying the Vetrell deed!"

"There's this to it," Lady de Winton said. "There's more to this than has been written down."

Mary put her finger on the mystery.

"John has some scheme wherein the White Lady plays a part. I think the Cardinal thought of it, or perhaps Mistress Boleyn, for it smacks of woman's wit to me. Still, if John wants a ghost that looks like me, I'll play the ghost for him if we can find some garb of white."

"I have a wedding dress from ancient days in an oaken chest that would fit you, Mary," and Lady de Winton began describing it. Mary suggested they get it and she try walking as a ghost.

"But first, father, give me the ring John sent."

Sir Charles gave her a twist of gilded paper. She undid it and revealed a blue enameled ring in which was set tiny stars of gold. She put it on her wedding finger which it fit perfectly.

"This shall be my guard until that day when John gives me another ring and calls me wife," she said, and then went off with Lady de Winton to search out the gown for the ghost.

That very afternoon they returned to Tall Trees, for there was much to do. Lady de Winton went with them to help make ready for the King.

A week went by in these preparations, a week in which Mary worked hard to stifle the pain in her heart. She had not much faith in John's ghost, but she practised her part diligently until she could go from her room to the narrow hall by the secret passage without a light, and Sir Charles swore in the dimly lit hall he could not see the panel slip back that let her into the hall.

"John has a ghost in you, daughter," he smiled, "though, in truth, I cannot fathom what good 'twill be."

Nor could Mary, and the face of Clement dark and saturnine like his uncle's, only more handsome, loomed large before her.

Then a swift rider came to say the King and his retinue would be there in the hour, that they had stopped at the Abbey of Chettleworth for some good Spanish wine.

Mary sighed and clasped the ring John had sent her and held it to her cheek a minute before she let it slide back to its hiding place between her breasts. She had worn it on a gold chain ever since it had come. She was very unhappy for she saw no way out of the trap she was in and did not believe the ghost—no matter how realistically it was played—would open the door.

When the gay pennants of the King's banners first appeared she took her place by her father and Lady de Winton. She wore her rose-colored velvet gown, and beneath the tight bodice her heart fluttered like the wings of a moth against a flame.

It was a beautiful sight—that long queue of richly dressed people riding up the broad approach with its tall trees. There was no mistaking King Henry's massive figure, and Mary's heart almost stopped beating when she saw the Abbot of Telva riding beside him.

IT WAS not very long before the gallant company were dismounting and crowding into Tall Trees. Sir Charles had scarcely greeted his monarch, made obeisance to the Queen, when King Henry, whose narrow pig-like eyes had been darting about, asked, "Where is the bride-to-be?"

Mary's eyes sought and found John, who was standing a little behind the King, as her father led her forth.

John smiled as though he hadn't a care in the world and made a little motion of his head toward a very young, beautiful

girl, richly appareled, who was standing beside him.

Even in the stress of the moment Mary knew this must be Anne Boleyn, and she did not wonder that her young, fresh beauty overshadowed that of the ageing and somewhat grim-faced Queen.

Sir Charles led her before the King and at the same time the Abbot Telva motioned to his nephew to step forward. This Clement did, but Mary turned her face away from him.

"Now, of a truth, girl, with such a face I'd not wish to take you to the altar myself," the King said gruffly.

Mary, not daring to say what was in her heart, lifted her hands in silent supplication. Before she had a chance, even if she had found the words, the Abbot came forward.

"As you know, Sire, she is a stubborn girl whose heart is set elsewhere. But I warrant once they're wed my nephew can change that countenance to one wreathed in smiles."

"No," Mary cried involuntarily, but the King, ignoring her, spoke to the Abbot.

"I doubt it—I doubt it greatly, but I have passed my word to you and come Wednesday she shall wed your nephew; that is, unless the ghost, this White Lady of Tall Trees, says otherwise. For, know, Lord Abbot, I will not go against a ghost, and I have sworn to Sir John de Wintón that if the ghost should make it plain it likes not this marriage to your nephew by walking in the narrow hall, or some such sign, then I will give the lady's hand so that the ghost be pleased."

"Sire," exclaimed the Abbot, "I have lived in Chettleworth these many years, and never before have I heard of the White Lady of Tall Trees."

At last Mary saw the scheme. She had guessed a little of it, of course, but now that it was spread before her in its entirety she understood John's unruffled manner, and the swift pang of jealousy that had seared through her when she saw him standing beside Mistress Boleyn subsided, for if the plan had originated in Anne Boleyn's brain, it was a good one and she was grateful.

The King, meanwhile, was looking at the Abbot, and Mary, for the first time, dared to let her clear eyes rest on those dark brilliant ones set in the heavy-jowled face. He laughed roughly.

"Well, this night, Lord Abbot, you will have a chance to see the ghost, for I invite you to watch with me in the narrow hall—you and some others whom I will select, and if the ghost walks and makes her wishes known, you will abide by them as I shall. Now, enough of these matters. Mistress Mary, whoever your husband be, I myself will see you wed and wish you well. Sir Charles and Lady de Winton, I cry my blessings on your union, though to do so I take prerogative from Abbot Telva. And now if your cellars can afford some good stout English ale, I think my stomach would relish a draught of it."

MANY hours later Mary stood in her room adjusting the satin folds of the ancient bride's dress which Lady de Winton had produced from her oaken chest.

Down in the narrow hallway in an embrasure she knew the King, the Abbot, Clement, John and four other high placed lords were waiting.

The embrasure was far away from that place in the wall where the secret panel opened. The light was only where the King was so that, until she came within his radius, they would not see how she got into the hall and, with luck, she could depart again the same way. If the Abbot had not been one of the party she would have had no fear for the success of the scheme, for it was a time when men believed in ghosts and when superstition greatly over-rode better judgment.

The Abbot was a different matter. Only he suspected a trick. She had read that in his eyes, and she was greatly afraid that he would know and expose the fact that the ghost was flesh and blood.

She had had no chance to speak to John. The exigencies of the Court had prevented her coming close to him, or, in fact, to anyone except in passing. She had been well watched, and since Henry had stepped into Tall Trees she had had no word alone with anyone. Even now the hall outside her door was guarded and, in fact all of Tall Trees was filled by men-at-arms who made up King Henry's bodyguard.

Had it not been for the secret passageway and panel there would have been no way for her to have gotten into the narrow hall. She rather wondered that Lady de Winton had not come to her, or her father, but Lady de Winton was probably in attendance on the Queen and Sir Charles, of course, would be with the King.

The clock marked near the hour that she had heard the King say. "The ghost will walk"—for while they had been at meat the King had talked much of the ghost—in fact, so much had he talked that Queen Katherine had asked to be of the party. But he had brushed her aside with, "Nay, Kate, 'tis best you only see the living, not the dead." And the Queen had given over.

Mary dusted a little flour, which she had made ready for the occasion, over her face and was pleased at the ghostly effect it gave her in the highly polished silver of her mirror. Then with a silent prayer she pressed the panel in her own wall that admitted her to the secret passageway.

HER feet went easily down the passageway, but when she reached the end of it and stood with her finger on the rose that would release the panel that would let her into the narrow hall she was terribly afraid. Her future, her lover, even her life, hung in the balance of the next few minutes, but Mary had made up her mind, as she had told the Abbot, that rather than become Clement's wife, she would die by her own hand—no matter to what perdition she was consigned. She caught her breath and then pressed the rose.

A second later she was in the hall. It was very silent. The people waiting in the embrasure were not talking, but she could hear even breathing which told her they were there. Slowly, her hands clasped demurely in front of her, she walked the length of the narrow hall. It seemed to her that a little ahead of her was a white shadow. It could not be her own, nor could she distinguish very clearly because it was on the other side of the ring of light which came from the embrasure. It wasn't until she reached the edge of it that she gasped with horror, for on the other side, just stepping into the light as she was doing, was another ghost, another figure in white, only this figure had a veil over its face.

A cold, craven feeling went down Mary's spine and she stopped short just as the other figure did. Was this a ghost, a real ghost, a denizen of another world? Before she had time to put her quavering thoughts into a concrete form a bevy of voices reached her.

"These are no ghosts!" the Abbot's voice was full of scorn.

"Attach me those two!" the King's tone rang out.

Mary could not move. Perhaps if it had not all come so quickly she could have regained the passageway. Her knees were weak as water and would not bear her toward it. Presently there were more lights brought by men-at-arms and she was standing in the front of the King alongside that other figure whose veil he was lifting.

"Well, Mistress Anne," he exclaimed, "so you have taken to dabbling in the spirit world?"

Anne Boleyn, for it was indeed she, sank to her knees.

"Oh, Sire, I did but wish to play my part to bring two hearts that truly love together, for I believe that in all the world there is nothing so wonderful as love."

Henry raised her gently and a tender expression stole over his face.

"Your sentiments do you much credit, Mistress Anne, as well as your soft heart, but I have sworn an oath, and no false ghost can let me break it. Because your motive was so sweet I do forgive this masquerade." Then he turned to Mary and said sternly, though she thought she could read regret written on this face, "Mistress Vetrell, you, too, I forgive because your deceit was prompted by a motive I can understand." For one fleeting second his gaze rested on Anne again. "But I cannot change my decree. Apparently the Lord Abbot of Telva spoke truth. There is no Vetrell ghost, so you must marry Clement and I wish you well of it."

"Thank you, Sire," cried the Abbot, and Clement echoed his uncle's words and then stepped forward to stand beside her.

"No, no," moaned Mary, and just then Anne Boleyn put her hand on the King's arm and cried, "Look, Henry, look!" forgetting in the stress of the moment that she should not address the King in so informal a manner. They all swung around and there standing in the light the circle made was a woman dressed in white!

"Oddsfish!" cried Henry. "Don't tell me the Queen herself has joined this masquerade."

"No, no—can you not see? It is a ghost, a true ghost. Look, her garments are transparent!" Anne cried again.

THEY all looked and wonder grew upon them for it was true. There stood a woman with a sweet, kindly face dressed in long white robes. She stood there and they all could see her and yet they could look through her too. She was nebulous, shining and translucent.

Sir Charles gasped.

"It is my wife—Mary's own mother come again!"

The Abbot began to cry and held up his cross.

"I exhort this figure, which must come from hell, to disappear!"

But the figure did not move and Henry, who was more courageous than the others, who had shrunk back gibbering into the embrasure, said, "Methinks, Abbot Telva, the figure comes from heaven, not hell, for she has no fear of you."

And it was true. Instead of disappearing, the figure walked toward the Abbot and, leaning over, whispered in his ear—at which the Abbot shrieked and ran from the hall, the black skirt of his cassock flying around his legs like a raven's wing.

Then the ghost of Mary's mother pointed to Clement who stood against the wall shivering. It pointed to Clement and then to the door, making plain in its sign language that it wished Clement to follow his uncle.

The King, who by now had recovered himself, though he continually made the sign of the cross on his broad chest, appeared to be enjoying the events that were taking place.

"Quite clearly, Don D'Aigula, the ghost will have none of you for its daughter, and as I swore to obey the spirits myself, neither will I. Get you gone, and tell your uncle that tomorrow either he or one of his priests will wed Mistress Mary to the man of her choice."

King Henry looked toward the ghost and seemed pleased when the visitation smiled upon him. Clement made haste to obey the King's commands and vanished from the narrow hall almost as quickly as his uncle had before him.

Then the ghost beckoned Mary and John de Winton out into the circle of light and,

holding her hands above their heads, she blessed them. Then with a little bow toward the King she gradually dissolved into the atmosphere.

A GREAT peace flowed over Mary. The benediction from her mother's ghost had wiped away everything but joy and the certainty that her life would be filled with content and happiness forevermore. At the very moment when all had seemed lost, and she had reached the nadir of hope, a miracle had happened. Mother love had materialized and made itself visible in all its manifold facets, and saved her and her love. Forgetting the fact there was an audience she turned to John. Their hands clasped, their lips met, and there was a completeness, a satisfaction in their kiss that she had never known before.

"Well, well, Sir John," the King's hearty voice swept them apart and to their feet, "such kissing had best wait until tomorrow when the maid is yours. And fear not you'll not have her to wife for I myself shall see to it and tuck you in your bridal bed with these two hands. See, Mistress Mary, I have been harsh with you because I was constrained against my will, for I want no trouble with Spaniards now —though later," he looked at Anne, "it may be otherwise. None felt worse than I who saw two ghosts when I expected one —yourself, as Sir John had told me. How got you in the hall, Anne?"

"I hid in the corner after dinner before the guards were set, Sire. I feared Mistress Vetrell had no way to come for I knew the Abbot watched and Sir John forgot to tell me of the secret passage, but, oh, my heart was sore when I thought I had spoiled your plan." The lovely girl smiled at Mary who smiled back again.

"Well, we have seen strange things tonight—strange and wonderful things," the King mused. "A ghost blessed us all, I think, except the Abbot and his sister's son, who liked not her message. Well, the Abbot shall wed you in the morning, and you must bring your bride to Court, Sir John, for she and Mistress Anne should become friends, who have been sister ghosts. Yes, bring your bride to Court and we will make a place for you about our person. Come now, this has been thirsty work. I think some ale—"

Mary's hand snuggled into John's as they walked along behind the King who had given his arm to Anne Boleyn.

"Sweet," John pressed her hand.

A presage of the joy to come shot through Mary.

"I will be married in my rose-colored velvet gown," she whispered.

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"Sit down, chum," it said. "And don't look so pop-eyed!"

Death Thumbs a Ride

BY ROBERT ARTHUR

Meet a new type of phantom . . . a hobo ghost—a hitch-hiking, ectoplasmic nuisance!

IT WAS inevitable, of course. Bound to happen some day. But why did it have to happen to me? What did *I do* to deserve the grief? And I was going to be married, too. I sank my last thousand into that trailer, almost. In it Monica and I were going on a honeymoon tour of the United States. We were going to see the country. I was going to write, and we were going to be happy as two turtles in the same shell.

Ha!

Ha ha!

If you detect bitterness in that laughter, I'll tell you why I'm bitter.

Because it had to be me, Mel—for Melvin—Mason who became the first person in the world to own a haunted trailer!

Now, a haunted castle is one thing. Even an ordinary haunted house can be liveable. In a castle, or a house, if there's a ghost around, you can lock yourself in the bedroom and get a little sleep. A nuisance, yes. But nothing a man couldn't put up with.

In a trailer, though! What are you going to do when you're sharing a trailer, even a super de luxe model with four built-in bunks, a breakfast nook, a complete bathroom, a radio, electric range, and easy chair, with a ghost? Where can you go to get away from it?

Ha!

Ha ha!

I've heard so much ghostly laughter the last week that I'm laughing myself that way now.

There I was. I had the trailer. I had the car to pull it, naturally. I was on my way to meet Monica in Hollywood, where she was living with an aunt from Iowa. And twelve miles west of Albany, the first night out, my brand new, spic-and-span trailer picks up a hitch-hiking haunt!

But maybe I'd better be chronological. It happened this way. I bought the trailer in New England—a Custom Clipper, with chrome and tan outside trim, $998. I hitched it on behind my '39 Chevvy and headed westward, happier than a lark when the dew's on the thorn. I'd been saving up for this day for two years, and I felt wonderful.

I took it easy, getting the feel of the trailer, and so I didn't make very good time. I crossed the Hudson just after dark, trundled through Albany in a rainstorm, and half an hour later pulled off the road into an old cowpath between two big rocks to spend the night.

The thunder was rolling back and forth overhead, and the lightning was having target practice with the trees. But I'd picked out a nice secluded spot and I made myself comfortable. I cooked up a tasty plate of beans, some coffee, and some home fries. When I had eaten I took off my shoes, slumped down in the easy chair, lit a Camel, and leaned back.

"Ah!" I said aloud. "Solid comfort. If only Monica were here, how happy we would be."

But she wasn't, and the static made the radio sound like a Japanese army bringing enlightenment and progress to a Chinese City, so I picked up a book.

It wasn't a very good book. I must have dozed off. Maybe I napped a couple of hours. Maybe three. Anyway, I woke with a start, the echo of a buster of a thunderbolt still rattling the willow-ware set in the china closet. My hair was standing on end from the electricity in the air, and blue lights were streaming off the chrome finish of the built-in-bar.

Then the door banged open, a swirl of rain swept in, and the wind—anyway, I thought it was the wind—slammed the door to. I heard a sound like a ghost—there's no other way to describe it—of a sigh.

"Now this," said a voice, "is something like!"

I had jumped up to shut the door, and I stood there with my unread book in my hand, gaping. The wind had blown a wisp of mist into my trailer and the mist, instead of evaporating, remained there, seeming to turn slowly and to settle into shape. It got more and more solid until—

Well, you know. It was a spectre. A haunt. A homeless ghost.

The creature remained there, regarding me in a decidedly cool manner.

"Sit down, chum," it said, "and don't look so pop-eyed. You make me nervous. This is my first night indoors in fifteen years, and I wanta enjoy it."

"Who—" I stammered—"who—"

"I'm not," the spectre retorted, "a brother owl, so don't who-who at me. What do I look like?"

"You look like a ghost," I told him.

"Now you're getting smart, chum. I *am* a ghost. What *kind* of a ghost do I look like?"

I INSPECTED it more closely. Now that the air inside my trailer had stopped eddying, it was reasonably firm of outline. It was a squat, heavy-set ghost, attired in ghostly garments that certainly never had come to it new. It wore the battered ghost of a felt hat, and a stubble of ghostly beard showed on his jowls.

"You look like a tramp ghost," I answered with distaste, and my uninvited visitor nodded.

"Just what I am, chum," he told me. "Call me Spike Higgins. Spike for short. That was my name before it happened."

"Before what happened?" I demanded, and the ghost wafted across the trailer to settle down on a bunk, where he lay down and crossed his legs, roisting one foot encased in a battered ghost of a shoe into the air.

"Before I was amachoor enough to fall asleep riding on top of a truck, and fall off right here fifteen years ago," he told me. "Ever since I been forced to haunt this place. I wasn't no Boy Scout, so I got punished by bein' made to stay here in one spot. Me, who never stayed in one spot two nights running before!

"I been gettin' kind of tired of it the last couple of years. They wouldn't even lemme haunt a house. No, I hadda do all my haunting out in th' open, where th' wind an' rain could get at me, and every dog that went by could bark at me. Chum, you don't know what it means to me to have you pick this place to stop."

"Listen," I said firmly, "you've got to get out of here!"

The apparition yawned.

"Chum," he said, "you're the one that's trespassin', not me. This is my happy haunting ground. Did I ask you to stop here?"

"You mean," I asked between clenched teeth, "that you won't go? You're going to stay here all night?"

"Right, chum," the ghost grunted. "Gimme a call for six a. m." He closed his eyes, and began snoring in an artificial and highly insulting manner.

Then I got sore. I threw the book at him, and it bounced off the bunk without bothering him in the least. Spike Higgins opened an eye and leered at me.

"Went right through me," he chortled. "Instead of me goin' through it. Ha ha! Ha ha ha! Joke."

"You—"I yelled, in a rage. "You—stuff!"

And I slammed him with the chair cushion, which likewise went through him without doing any damage. Spike Higgins opened both eyes and stuck out his tongue at me.

Obviously I couldn't hurt him, so I got control of myself.

"Listen," I said, craftily. "You say you are doomed to haunt this spot forever? You can't leave?"

"Forbidden to leave," Spike answered. "Why?"

"Never mind," I gritted. "You'll find out."

I snatched up my slicker and hat and scrambled out into the storm. If that ghost was doomed to remain in that spot forever, I wasn't. I got in the car, got the motor going, and backed out of there. It took a lot of maneuvering in the rain, with mud

underwheel, but I made it. I got straightened out on the concrete and headed westward.

I didn't stop until I'd covered twenty miles. Then, beginning to grin as I thought of the shock the ghost of Spike Higgins must have felt when I yanked the trailer right out from under him, I parked on a stretch of old, unused road and then crawled back into the trailer again.

Inside, I slammed the door and—

Ha!

Ha ha!

Ha ha ha!

"Yes, more bitter laughter. Spike Higgins was still there, sound asleep and snoring.

I said something unprintable. Spike Higgins opened his eyes sleepily.

"Hello," he yawned. "Been having fun?"

"Listen," I got out. "I—thought—you — were — doomed — to — stay — back — there — where — I — found — you — forever!"

The apparition yawned again.

"Your mistake, chum. I didn't say I was doomed to stay. I said I was forbidden to leave. I didn't leave. You hauled me away. It's all your responsibility and I'm a free agent now."

"You're a what?"

"I'm a free agent. I can ramble as far as I please. I can take up 'boing again. You've freed me. Thanks, chum. I won't forget."

"Then—then—" I sputtered. Spike Higgins nodded.

"That's right. I've adopted you. I'm going to stick with you. We'll travel together."

"But you can't! I cried out, aghast. "Ghosts don't travel around! They haunt houses—or cemeteries—or maybe woods. But—"

"What do you know about ghosts?" Spike Higgins' voice held sarcasm. "There's all kinds of ghosts, chum. Includin' hobo ghosts, tramp ghosts, ghosts with itchin' feet who can't stay put in one spot. Let me tell you, chum, a 'bo ghost like me ain't never had no easy time of it.

"Suppose they do give him a house to haunt? All right, he's got a roof over his head, but there he is, stuck. Houses don't move around. They don't go places. They stay in spot till they rot.

"But things are different now. You've helped bring in a new age for the brotherhood of spooks. Now a fellow can haunt a house and be on the move at the same time. He can work at his job and still see the country. These trailers are the answer to a problem that's been bafflin' the best minds in th' spirit world for thousands of years. It's the newest thing, the latest and best. Haunted trailers. I tell you, we'll probably erect a monument to you at our next meeting. The ghost of a monument, anyway."

SPIKE HIGGINS had raised up on an elbow to make his speech. Now, grimacing, he lay back.

"That's enough, chum," he muttered. "Talking uses up my essence. I'm going to merge for awhile. See you in the morning."

"Merge with what?" I asked. Spike Higgins was already so dim I could hardly see him.

"Merge with the otherwhere," a faint, distant voice told me, and Spike Higgins was gone.

I waited a minute to make sure. Then I breathed a big sigh of relief. I looked at my slicker, at my wet feet, at the book on the floor, and knew it had all been a dream. I'd been walking in my sleep. Driving in it too. Having a nightmare.

I hung up the slicker, slid out of my clothes, and got into a bunk. Then I took

a grateful pull of a bottle of Scotch, although Monica, who does not believe in drinking, would have disapproved, and fell asleep.

I woke up late, and for a moment felt panic. Then I breathed easily again. The other bunk was untenanted. Whistling, I jumped up, showered, dressed, ate, and got under way.

It was a swell day. Blue sky, wind, sunshine, birds singing. Thinking of Monica, I almost sang with them as I rolled down the road. Swell trailer. Swell day. Swell world. And in a week I'd be pulling up in front of Monica's aunt's place in Hollywood and tooting the horn—

That was the moment when a cold draft of air sighed along the back of my neck, and the short hairs rose.

I turned, almost smacking into a hay wagon. Beside me was a misty figure.

"I got tired of riding back there alone," Spike Higgins told me. "I'm gonna ride up front a while an' look at th' scenery."

"You—you—" I shook with rage so that we nearly ran off the road. Spike Higgins reached out, grabbed the wheel in tenuous fingers, and jerked us back onto our course again.

"Take it easy, chum," he said. There's enough competition in this world I'm in, without you hornin' into th' racket."

I didn't say anything, but my thoughts must have been written on my face. I'd thought he was just a nightmare. But he was real. A ghost had moved in on me, and I hadn't the faintest idea how to move him out.

Spike Higgins grinned with a trace of malice.

"Sure, chum," he said. "It's perfectly logical. There's haunted castles, haunted palaces, and haunted houses. Why not a haunted trailer?"

"Why not haunted ferryboats?" I demanded with bitterness. "Why not haunted Pullmans? Why not haunted boxcars?"

"You think there ain't?" Spike Higgins' misty countenance registered surprise at my ignorance. "Could I tell you tales! There's a haunted ferryboat makes the crossing at Poughkeepsie every stormy night at midnight. There's a haunted private car on the Atchison, Santa Fé. Pal of mine haunts it. He always rode the rods, but he was a square dealer, and they gave him the private car for a reward.

"Then there's a box car on the New York Central that never gets where it's going. Never has yet. No matter where it starts out for, it winds up some place else. Bunch of my buddies haunt it. And another box car on the Southern Pacific that never has a train to pull it. Runs by itself. It's driven I dunno how many dispatchers crazy, when they saw it go past right ahead of a limited. I could tell you—"

"Don't!" I ordered. "I forbid you to. I don't want to hear."

"Why, sure, chum," Spike Higgins agreed. "But you'll get used to it. You'll be seein' a lot of me. Maybe we'll even get to be buddies."

He relapsed into silence. I drove along, my mind churning. I had to get rid of him. *Had* to. Before we reached California, at the very latest. But I didn't have the faintest idea in the world how I was going to."

Then, abruptly, Spike Higgins' ghost sat up straight.

"Stop!" he ordered. "Stop, I say!"

We were on a lonely stretch of road, bordered by old cypresses, with weed-grown marshland beyond. I didn't see any reason for stopping. But Spike Higgins reached out and switched off the ignition key. Then he slammed on the emergency brake. We came squealing to a stop, and just missed going into a ditch.

"What did you do that for?" I yelled.

"You almost ditched us! Confound you, you ectoplasmic, hitch-hiking nuisance! If I ever find a way to lay hands on you—"

"Quiet, chum!" the apparition told me rudely. "I just seen an old pal of mine. Slippery Samuels. I ain't seen him since he dropped a bottle of nitro just as he was gonna break into a bank in Mobile sixteen years ago. We're gonna give him a ride."

"Give him a ride in a gnat's eye!" I rasped. "This is my car, and I'm not picking up any more—"

"It may be your car," Spike Higgins sneered, "but I'm the resident haunt, and I got full powers to extend hospitality to any buddy ghosts I want, see? Rule 11, subdivision c. Look it up. Hey, Slippery, climb in!"

A finger of fog pushed through the partly open window of the car at his hail, enlarged, and there was a second apparition in the front seat with me.

The newcomer was long and lean, just as shabbily dressed as Spike Higgins, with a ghostly countenance as mournful as a Sunday School picnic on a rainy day.

"Spike, you old son of a gun," the second spook murmured, in hollow tones that would have brought gooseflesh to a statue. "How've you been? What're you doing here? Who's he?"—nodding at me.

"Never mind him," Spike said disdainfully. "I'm haunting his trailer. Listen, whatever became of the old gang"

"Still 'boing it," the long, lean apparition sighed. "Nitro Nelson is somewhere around. Pacific Pete and Buffalo Benny are laying over in a haunted jungle some place near Toledo. I had a date to join 'em, but a storm blew me back to Wheeling a couple days ago."

"Mmm," Spike Higgins' ghost muttered. "Maybe we'll run into 'em. Let's go back in my trailer and do a little chinning. As for you, chum, make camp any time you want. Ta ta."

The two apparitions oozed through the back of the coupé and were gone. I was boiling inside, but there was nothing I could do.

I drove on for another hour, went through Toledo, then stopped at a wayside camp. I paid my dollar, picked out a spot, and parked.

But when I entered the trailer, the ghosts of Spike Higgins and Slippery Samuels, the bank robber, weren't there. Nor had they shown up by the time I finished dinner. In fact I ate, washed, and got into bed with no sign of them.

Breathing a prayer that maybe Higgins had abandoned me to go back to 'boing it in the spirit world, I fell asleep. And began to dream. About Monica—

WHEN I woke, my first thought was that I'd been on a binge, passed out, and was coming to in the back room of a saloon. There was a sickly alcohol smell in the air, and the heavy staleness of old tobacco smoke.

Then I knew that couldn't be, because I distinctly remembered falling asleep in the trailer. And I opened my eyes. Luckily, I opened them prepared for the worst. Even so, I wasn't prepared well enough.

Spike Higgins was back. Ha! Ha ha! Ha ha ha! I'll say he was back. He lay on the opposite bunk, his eyes shut, his mouth open, snoring. Just the ghost of a snore, but quite loud enough. On the bunk above him lay his bank-robber companion. In the easy chair was slumped a third apparition, short and stout, with a round, whiskered face. A tramp spirit, too.

So was the ghost stretched out on the floor, gaunt and cadaverous. So was the small, mournful spook in the bunk above me, his ectoplasmic hand swinging over the side, almost in my face. Tramps, all

of them. Hobo spooks. Five hobo phantoms passed out in my trailer!

Yes, passed out. The alcoholic smell in the air was my scotch. The bottle lay on the floor, the cork out. The liquor had run out and evaporated. That way, I suppose, the alcohol had permeated those ghosts' ectoplasm, giving them a jag.

And there were cigarette butts in all the ash trays, and burns on my built-in writing desk. The cigarettes apparently had just been lit and let burn. I suppose they took in the smoke the same way they did the alcohol fumes. The air was choking with stale smoke and alky smell, and I had a headache I could have sold for a fire alarm, it was ringing so loudly in my skull.

I knew what had happened. During the night Spike Higgins and his pal had rounded up some more of their ex-hobo companions. Brought them back. To *my* trailer. Now—I was so angry I saw all five of them through a red haze that gave their ectoplasm a ruby tinge. Then I got hold of myself. I couldn't throw them out. I couldn't harm them. I couldn't touch them.

And I couldn't wait any longer, trying to think of a way to get rid of them. I'd almost reached the point where I'd be glad to kill myself too, so I could get at them on their own ground. I even toyed with the idea for several seconds before abandoning it.

No, there was only one thing I could do. Admit I was beaten. Take my loss and quit while I could. It was a bitter pill to swallow. But if I wanted to reach Monica, if I wanted to enjoy the honeymoon we'd planned, I'd have to give up the fight.

I got into my clothes. Quietly I sneaked out, locking the trailer behind me. Then I hunted up the owner of the trailer camp, a lanky man, hard-eyed, but well dressed. I figured he must have money.

"Had sort of a party last night, hey?" he asked me, with a leering wink. "I seen lights, an' heard singing, long after midnight. Not loud, though, so I didn't bother you. But it looked like somebody was havin' a high old time."

I gritted my teeth.

"That was me," I said. "I couldn't sleep. I got up and turned on the radio. Truth is, I haven't slept a single night in that trailer. I guess I wasn't built for trailer life. That job cost me $998 new, just three days ago. I've got the bill-of-sale. How'd you like to buy it for five hundred, and make two hundred easy profit on it?"

He gnawed his lip, but knew the trailer was a bargain. We settled for three-fifty. I gave him the bill-of-sale, took the money, uncoupled, got into the coupé, and left there.

As I turned the bend in the road, heading westward, there was no sign that Spike Higgins' ghost was aware of what had happened.

I even managed to grin as I thought of his rage when he woke up to find I had abandoned him. It was almost worth the money I'd lost to think of it.

Beginning to feel better, I stepped on the throttle, piling up miles between me and that trailer. At least I was through with Spike Higgins and his friends.

Ha!

Ha ha!

Ha ha ha!

That's what I thought.

ALONG toward the middle of the afternoon I was well into Illinois. It was open country, and monotonous, so I turned on my radio. And the first thing I got was a police broadcast.

"All police, Indiana and Illinois! Be on the watch for a tan-and-chrome trailer, stolen about noon from a camp near To-

ledo. The thieves are believed heading west in it. That is all."

I gulped. It couldn't be! But— It sounded like my trailer, all right. I looked in my rear-vision mirror, apprehensively. The road behind was empty. I breathed a small sigh of relief. I breathed it too soon. For at that moment, around a curve half a mile behind me, something swung into sight and came racing down the road after me.

The trailer.

Ha!

Ha ha!

There it came, a tan streak that zipped around the curve and came streaking after me, zig-zagging wildly from side to side of the road, making at least sixty—without any car pulling it!

My flesh crawled, and my hair stood on end. I stepped on the throttle. Hard. And I picked up speed in a hurry. In a half minute I was doing seventy, and the trailer was still gaining. Then I hit eighty—and passed a motorcycle cop parked beside the road.

I had just a glimpse of his pop-eyed astonishment as I whizzed past, with the trailer chasing me fifty yards behind. Then kicking on his starter he slammed after us.

Meanwhile, in spite of everything the car would do, the trailer pulled up behind me and I heard the coupling clank as it was hitched on. At once my speed dropped. The trailer was swerving dangerously, and I had to slow. Behind me the cop was coming, siren open wide, but I didn't have time to worry about him because Spike Higgins was materializing beside me.

"Whew!" he said, grinning at me. "My essence feels all used up. Thought you could give Spike Higgins and his pals the slip, huh? You'll learn, chum, you'll learn. That trooper looks like a tough baby. You'll have fun trying to talk yourself out of this."

"Yes, but see what it'll get *you*, you ectoplasmic excresence!" I raged at him. "The trailer will be stored away in some county garage for months, as evidence while I'm being held for trial on charge of stealing it. And how'll you like haunting a garage?"

Higgins' face changed.

"Say, that's right," he muttered. "My first trip in fifteen years, too."

He put his fingers to his lips, and blew, the shrill ghost of a whistle. In a moment the coupé was filled with cold, clammy drafts as Slippery Samuels and the other three apparitions appeared in the seat beside Higgins.

Twisting and turning and seeming to intermingle a lot, they peered out at the cop, who was beside the car now, one hand on his gun butt, trying to crowd me over to the shoulder.

"All right, boys!" Higgins finished explaining. "You know what we gotta do. Me an' Slippery'll take the car. You guys take the trailer."

They slipped through the open windows like smoke. Then I saw Slippery Samuels holding to the left front fender, and Spike Higgins holding to the right, their ectoplasm streaming out horizontal to the road, stretched and thinned by the air rush. And an instant later we began to move with a speed I had never dreamed of reaching.

We zipped ahead of the astonished cop, and the speedometer needle began to climb again. It took the trooper an instant to believe his eyes. Then with a yell he yanked out his gun and fired. A bullet bumbled past; then he was too busy trying to overtake us again to shoot.

The speedometer said ninety now, and was still climbing. It touched a hundred and stuck there. I was trying to pray when down the road a mile I saw a sharp curve, a bridge, and a deep river. I froze. I couldn't even yell.

We came up to the curb so fast that I was still trying to move my lips when we hit it. I didn't make any effort to take it. Instead I slammed on the brakes and prepared to plow straight ahead into a fence, a stand of young poplars, and the river.

But just as I braked, I heard Spike Higgins' ghostly scream, "Allay-OOP!"

And before we reached the ditch, car and trailer swooped up in the air. An instant later at a height of a hundred and fifty feet, we hurtled straight westward over the river and the town beyond.

I'd like to have seen the expression on the face of the motorcycle cop then. As far as that goes, I'd like to have seen my own.

Then the river was behind us, and the town, and we were swooping down toward a dank, gloomy looking patch of woods through which ran an abandoned railway spur. A moment later we struck earth with a jouncing shock and came to rest.

Spike Higgins and Slippery Slim let go the fenders and straightened themselves up. Spike Higgings dusted ghostly dust off his palms and leered at me.

"How was that, chum?" he asked. "Neat, hey?"

"How—" I stuttered—"how—"

"Simple," Spike Higgins answered. "Anybody that can tip tables can do it. Just levitation, 'at's all. Hey, meet the boys. You ain't been introduced yet. This is Buffalo Benny, this one is Toledo Ike, this one Pacific Pete."

The fat spook, the cadaverous one, and the melancholy little one appeared from behind the car, and smirked as Higgins introduced them. Then Higgins waved a hand impatiently.

"C'm on, chum," he said. "There's a road there, takes us out of these woods. Let's get going. It's almost dark, and we don't wanna spend the night here. This used to be in Dan Bracer's territory.

"Who's Dan Bracer?" I demanded, getting the motor going, because I was as anxious to get away from there as Spike Higgins' spook seemed to be.

"Just a railroad dick," Spike Higgins said, with a distinctly uneasy grin. "Toughest bull that ever kicked a poor 'bo off a freight."

"So mean he always drunk black coffee," Slippery Samuels put in, in a mournful voice. "Cream turned sour when he picked up the pitcher."

"Not that we was afraid of him—" Buffalo Benny, the fat apparition, squeaked. "But—"

"We just never liked him," Toledo Ike croaked, a sickly look on his ghostly features. "O' course, he ain't active now. He was retired a couple years back, an' jes' lately I got a rumor he was sick."

"Dyin'," Pacific Pete murmured hollowly.

"Dyin'." They all sighed the word, looking apprehensive. Then Spike Higgins' ghost scowled truculently at me.

"Never mind about Dan Bracer," he snapped. "Let's just get goin' out of here. And don't give that cop no more thought. You think a cop is gonna turn in a report that a car and trailer he was chasin' suddenly sailed up in the air an' flew away like a airplane? Not on your sweet life. He ain't gonna say nothing to nobody about it."

APPARENTLY he was right, because after I had gotten out of the woods, with some difficulty, and onto a secondary highway, there was no further sign of pursuit. I headed westward again, and Spike Higgins and his pals moved back to the trailer, where they lolled about, letting my cigarettes burn and my liquor evaporate, and threatening to call the attention of the police to me when I complained.

I grew steadily more morose and des-

perate as the Pacific Coast, and Monica, came nearer. I was behind schedule, due to Spike Higgins' insistence on my taking a roundabout route so they could see the Grand Canyon, and no way to rid myself of the damnable haunts appeared. I couldn't even abandon the trailer. Spike Higgins had been definite on that point. It was better to haul a haunted trailer around than to have one chasing you, he pointed out, and shuddering at the thought of being pursued by a trailer full of ghosts wherever I went, I agreed.

But if I couldn't get rid of them, it meant no Monica, no marriage, no honeymoon. And I was determined that nothing as insubstantial as a spirit was going to interfere with my life's happiness.

Just the same, by the time I had gotten over the mountains and into California, I was almost on the point of doing something desperate. Apparently sensing this, Spike Higgins and the others had been on their good behavior. But I could still see no way to get rid of them.

It was early afternoon when I finally rolled into Hollywood, haggard and unshaven, and found a trailer camp, where I parked. Heavy hearted, I bathed and shaved and put on clean clothes. I didn't know what I was going to say to Monica, but I was already several days behind schedule, and I couldn't put off calling her.

There was a pay phone in the camp office. I looked up Ida Bracer—her aunt's name—in the book, then put through the call.

Monica herself answered. Her voice sounded distraught.

"Oh, Mel," she exclaimed, as soon as I announced myself, "where have you been? I've been expecting you for just days."

"I was delayed," I told her, bitterly. "Spirits. I'll explain later."

"Spirits?" Her tone seemed cold. "Well, anyway, now that you're here at last, I must see you at once. Mel, Uncle Dan is dying."

"Uncle Dan?" I echoed.

"Yes, Aunt Ida's brother. He used to live in Iowa, but a few months ago he was taken ill, and he came out to be with aunt and me. Now he's dying. The doctor says it's only a matter of hours."

"Dying?" I repeated again. "Your Uncle Dan, from Iowa, dying?"

Then it came to me. I began to laugh. Exultantly.

"I'll be right over!" I said, and hung up.

Still chuckling, I hurried out and unhitched my car. Spike Higgins stared at me suspiciously.

"Just got an errand to do," I said airily. "Be back soon."

"You better be," Spike Higgins' ghost said. "We wanta drive around and see these movie stars' houses later on."

Ten minutes later Monica herself, trim and lovely, was opening the door for me. In high spirits, I grabbed her around the waist, and kissed her. She turned her cheek to me, then releasing herself, looked at me strangely.

"Mel," she frowned, "what in the world is wrong with you?"

"Nothing," I caroled. "Monica darling, I've got to talk to your uncle."

"But he's too sick to see anyone. He's sinking fast, the doctor says."

"All the more reason why I must see him," I told her, and pushed into the house. "Where is he, upstairs?"

I hurried up, and into the sickroom. Monica's uncle, a big man with a rugged face and a chin like the prow of a battleship, was in bed, breathing stertorously.

"Mr. Bracer!" I said, breathless, and his eyes opened slowly.

"Who're you?" a voice as raspy as a shovel scraping a concrete floor growled.

"I'm going to marry Monica," I told

him. "Mr. Bracer, have you ever heard of Spike Higgins? Or Slippery Samuels? Or Buffalo Benny, Pacific Pete, Toledo Ike?"

"Heard of 'em?" A bright glow came into the sick man's eyes. "Ha! I'll say I have. And laid hands on 'em, too, more'n once. But they're dead now."

"I know they are," I told him. "But they're still around. Mr. Bracer, how'd you like to meet up with them again"

"Would I!" Dan Bracer murmured, and his hands clenched, in unconscious anticipation. "Ha!"

"Then," I said, "if you'll wait for me in the cemetery the first night after—after —well, anyway, wait for me, and I'll put you in touch with them,"

The ex-railroad detective nodded. He grinned broadly, like a tiger viewing its prey, and eager to be after it. Then he lay back, his eyes closed, and Monica, running in, gave a little gasp.

"He's dead!" she said.

"He certainly is," I chuckled. "Ha ha! Ha ha ha! What a surprise this is going to be to certain parties."

THE funeral was held in the afternoon, two days later. I didn't see Monica much in the interim. In the first place, though she hadn't know her uncle well, and wasn't particularly grieved, there were a lot of details to be attended to. In the second place, Spike Higgins and his pals kept me on the jump. I had to drive around Hollywood, to all the stars' houses, to Malibou Beach, Santa Monica, Laurel Canyon, and the various studios, so they could rubberneck.

Then too, Monica rather seemed to be avoiding me, when I did have time free. But I was too inwardly gleeful at the prospect of getting rid of the ghosts of Higgins and his pals to notice.

I managed to slip away from Higgins to attend the funeral of Dan Bracer, but could not help grinning broadly, and even at times chuckling, as I thought of his happy anticipation of meeting Spike Higgins and the others again. Monica eyed me oddly, but I could explain later. It wasn't quite the right moment to go into details.

After the funeral, Monica said she had a headache, so I promised to come around later in the evening. I returned to the trailer to find Spike Higgins and the others sprawled out, smoking my cigarettes again. Higgins looked at me with dark suspicion.

"Chum," he said, "we wanta be hitting the road again. We leave tomorrow, get me?"

"Tonight, Spike," I said cheerfully. "Why wait? Right after sundown you'll be on our way. To distant parts. Tra la, tra le, tum tum te tum."

He scowled, but could think of no objection. I waited impatiently for sundown. As soon as it was thoroughly dark, I hitched up and drove out of the trailer camp, heading for the cemetery where Dan Bracer had been buried that afternoon.

Spike Higgins was still surly, but unsuspicious until I drew up and parked by the low stone wall at the nearest point to Monica's uncle's grave. Then, gazing out at the darkness-shadowed cemetery, he looked uneasy.

"Say," he snarled, "whatcha stoppin' here for? Come on, let's be movin'."

"In a minute, Spike," I said. "Tra la, tra le. I have some business here."

I slid out and hopped over the low wall.

"Mr. Bracer!" I called. "Mr. Bracer!"

I listened, but a long freight rumbling by half a block distant, where the Union Pacific lines entered the city, drowned out any sound. For a moment I could see nothing. Then a misty figure came into view among the headstones.

"Mr. Bracer!" I called as it approached. "This way!"

The figure headed toward me. Behind me Spike Higgins, Slippery Samuels and the rest of the ghostly crew were pressed against the wall, staring apprehensively into the darkness. And they were able to recognize the dim figure approaching before I could be sure of it.

"Dan Bracer!" Spike Higgins choked, in a high, ghostly squeal.

"It's him!" Slippery Samuels groaned lugubriously.

"In the spirit!" Pacific Pete wailed. "Oh oh oh oh OH!"

They tumbled backwards, with shrill squeaks of dismay. Dan Bracer's spirit came forward faster. Paying no attention to me, he took out after the retreating five.

Higgins turned and fled, wildly, with the others at his heels. They were headed toward the railroad tracks, over which the freight was still rumbling, and Dan Bracer was now at their heels. Crowding each other, Higgins and Slippery Samuels and Buffalo Benny swung onto a passing car, with Pacific Pete and Toledo Ike catching wildly at the rungs of the next.

THEY drew themselves up to the top of the box cars, and stared back. Dan Bracer's ghost seemed, for an instant, about to be left behind. But one long ectoplasmic arm shot out. A ghostly hand caught the rail of the caboose, and Dan Bracer swung aboard. A moment later, he was running forward along the tops of the box cars, and up ahead of him, Spike Higgins and his pals were racing toward the engine.

That was the last I saw of them—five phantom figures fleeing, the sixth pursuing in happy anticipation. Then they were gone out of my life, headed east.

Still laughing to myself at the manner in which I had rid myself of Spike Higgins' ghost, and so made it possible for Monica and me to be married and enjoy our honeymoon trailer trip after all, I drove to Monica's aunt's house.

"Melvin!" Monica said sharply, as she answered my ring. "What are you laughing about now."

"Your uncle," I chuckled. "He—"

"My uncle!" Monica gasped. "You—you fiend! You laughed when he died! You laughed all during his funeral! Now you're laughing because he's dead!"

"No, Monica!" I said. "Let me explain. About the spirits, and how I—"

Her voice broke.

"Forcing your way into the house—laughing at my poor Uncle Dan—laughing at his funeral—"

"But Monica!" I cried. "It isn't that way at all. I've just been to the cemetery, and—"

"And came back laughing," Monica retorted. "I never want to see you again. Our engagement is broken. And worst of all is the *way* you laugh. It's so—so ghostly! So spooky. Blood-chilling. Even if you hadn't done the other things, I could never marry a man who laughs like you do. So here's your ring. And goodby."

Leaving me staring at the ring in my hand, she slammed the door. And that was that. Monica is very strong-minded, and what she says, she means. I couldn't even try to explain. About Spike Higgins. And how I'd unconsciously come to laugh that way through associating with five phantoms. After all, I'd just rid myself of them for good. And the only way Monica would ever have believed my story would have been from my showing her Spike Higgins' ghost himself.

Ha!

Ha ha!

Ha ha ha ha!

If you know anyone who wants to buy a practically unused trailer, cheap, have them get in touch with me.

Lancelot Biggs was dead; or else missing in the gray nothingness of negative space . . .

The Ghost of Lancelot Biggs

BY NELSON S. BOND

The shade of that gangling genius of the spaceways—Lancelot Biggs—comes back to haunt his old ship mates.

FOLKS say I'm hard-boiled; well, maybe so. My mama told me a long time ago—when I was a brat in three-cornered britches—that if you keep your upper lip rigid and a steely glint in the old optics and *le craque sage* dripping from your tongue, not many people will be hopping around, pushing chips off your shoul-

der and daring you to take off your glasses.

And mama was right. So I'm commonly known as "that smart-Aleck Bert Donovan," and folks think I'm hard-boiled—but I didn't feel like any ten-minute egg the afternoon Diane Hanson, her pop, Cap Hanson, skipper of the freighter *Saturn*, and I came home from Lancelot Biggs' funeral.

Lancelot Biggs was dead. Or missing for more than seven weeks in the gray nothingness of negative space—which is the same thing. He had hurled himself into this desolate matrix universe deliberately, sacrificing himself to save the lives of his friends and shipmates when we were all doomed to die horribly by crashing headlong into massive Jupiter.

Since the life-skiff in which he had entombed himself was tiny, poorly provisioned and inadequately supplied with water, there was no longer the faintest glimmer of hope that he might, somehow and miraculously, have survived. Even had he found some way of escaping the minus boundaries of the weird nega-universe into which he had fled. Therefore, today he had been formally "buried." In spirit, so to speak, or by remote control. The way the old boys in the 19th Century used to bury lost mariners. With a long cortege and a tall stone, engraven with the words: *Here lies So-and so—Lost at Sea.*

Only this being the enlightened 22nd Century and we being a bit more reasonable, Biggs' marker read: *In Memory of Lt. Lancelot Biggs—Lost in Space.*

So we were a sad looking trio when we came back to the apartment which Lanse Biggs and I used to share near Long Island Spaceport. Cap Hanson had lost the finest First Mate to ever tread the ramps of a space-lugger, I had lost the best friend a man had ever had, and Diane—well, her loss was the greatest. She had lost the man she loved, the lean, gangling man to whom, had not fate's grim hand intervened, she would now be married.

And like I said—folks call me hard-boiled. But I reckon I'm only gently poached compared to the men who operate under the title of Big Business, because when we entered the apartment the telephone was jangling like an opium addict's nerves, and when I picked it up I was talking to the Assignment Clerk of the I.P.C., the Corporation from which we draw our weekly credit checks.

"Donovan?" he yelped. "Is that you, Donovan?"

"Mmm," I said.

"Is Captain Hanson there?"

I glanced at the skipper, whose arms were about his quietly sobbing daughter. He was a gruff old codger, Hanson; a more irascible space-tyrant never lifted gravs. But he had a heart buried somewhere beneath that crust, a heart that was now as hurt and grieved as my own.

"Why?" I asked.

"Never mind why!" snapped the A.C. "Put him on!"

I said grimly, "Okay, Buster! I'll play toddle-top with you. I'll *put* him on now and *take* you on the next time I see you. Skipper—" And I handed him the phone.

Whatever the A.C. told the Old Man, it threw a jolt into him. I saw Hanson stiffen like a rheumatic neck, and he roared, *"Wha-a-at!* Impossible! Why, you damned young jackanapes, don't you know the staff and crew of the *Saturn* are in mourning? We won't—"

THEN there was clacking from the earpiece, metallic and ominous, and the Old Man's face turned from crimson to an outraged mauve. But anxious lines corrugated his brow and he forced a modulated acquiescence to his voice.

"I see," he said thoughtfully. "So that's the way it is, eh? Well—" Grudgingly "—all right, then. But I don't like it, sir. And you may tell your superiors—"

The A.C. must have hung up on him. He turned to us slowly. "Sparks—" he said.

Diane Hanson stared at her father. "Daddy, what is it? Is it—some news about Lancelot?"

"No, honey," said the Old Man gravely. "Don't keep that hope burning, dear. You'll only torture yourself. This is something entirely different. Something—" His stifled anger burst out afresh "—something dastardly! They should be boiled in oil, the whole rotten kit and kiboodle of them! But I'm helpless. Orders are orders. Sparks, get in contact with the staff and crew immediately. Tell them to pack their duffle and be aboard the *Saturn* by midnight."

I said, "What! But, Skipper, we were granted leave to mourn Biggs—"

"I know it! But the Corporation has countermanded our leaves. We're to lift gravs at twelve sharp for Europa. Polarium has just been discovered there, and the whole solar system has gone crazy. Prospectors from every corner of the universe are blasting for Europa as fast as their jets will push them. And since the *Saturn* is the fastest lugger in the I.P.S. fleet, we've got to get there and stake claims for the Corporation.

"I—I'm sorry it has to be this way, Diane. I don't want to leave you. But the clerk said if I refused to take command, they'd appoint someone else—"

"I know, Daddy," said Diane. She forced a wisp of a smile to her lips. She understood as well as I did what he was trying to tell us. The Old Man was—and is—one of the greatest skippers who ever blasted a rocket. But he's an old man in fact as well as title. Twice before our employers had threatened to remove his command, ground him, give his bridge to a younger officer. A man of action, the Skipper dared not look forward to the day when he had to bid farewell to space. To refuse this emergency command would be to risk everything. And so:

"I understand, Daddy," said Diane Hanson. "But you don't have to leave me."

"And, Sparks, tell Todd he'll serve as First Mate," the skipper told me. "Wilson will be Second—*hey?* What did you say, Diane?"

Diane's voice was gentle, but there was a tightness about her eyes and lips I recognized. I'd seen it before, on her father's face. I knew what it meant. Stubbornness mixed with a dash of determination.

"You won't leave me," she said calmly, "because I'm going with you!"

"You're going with— Oh, no! No, you're not! This isn't any shuttle for a girl. There's danger out there near Jupiter, honey. I won't let you—"

"You can't stop me, Dad. Can't you see I've *got* to go? Please! I'll go crazy sitting home here by myself. And besides, it was out there—near Jupiter—that *he*—"

Well, I saw how she felt. And I didn't much blame her for feeling she had a right to make at least one farewell trip to the part of space wherefrom her lover had disappeared. The Old Man growled softly. Then he wiped his glasses with a sort of savage vehemence. And he said, "Well, then, get your things packed. And Sparks—call Chief Garrity. Tell him to have the hypos and all control equipment ready for immediate flight—"

Thus at twelve midnight sharp, Earth time, which is 7-R-4 Solar Constant, the *Saturn* lifted gravs for Europa, the second satellite of monstrous Jupiter.

THERE'S no use boring you with the routine details. We blasted from a Long Island cradle, set course and constant for Europa, waited till we were about six hours away from the Earth's gravitational field, then cut over to the V-I unit —the "velocity intensifier" invented by

Lancelot Biggs which had made the *Saturn* the fastest ship in space, increasing its speed potential from a slovenly 200,000 *mph* to something only a trifle less than the limiting velocity of light.

In the old days, before the installation of the V-I unit, a shuttle to Jupiter meant a journey of about a hundred days, more or less, depending on the positions of the planets. Now, however, the *Saturn* had a speed potential of 650,000,000 miles per hour! Which *didn't* mean that we could actually get to Jupiter in an hour. There were other factors which had to be allowed for: initial velocity, deceleration upon approaching our goal, and all that stuff.

To make a short story stubby, though, we could look forward confidently to setting foot on Europa within two days at the most.

Which gave us a big jump over the rest of those who were high-balling it for the wealth-laden satellite.

Dick Todd, looking awkward and a trifle embarrassed in his First Officer's braid, came to my turret at the end of our first day's flight. Things had happened so suddenly that no one had found time to tell him the score. He was one huge question mark on toes.

"How come, Sparks?" he demanded. "What's this all about? First we're on leave of absence, then they dump us in the *Saturn* and shove us off for Europa. Why?"

I said, "The answer's as simple as your half-witted brother. What do you get from the bank, stupid?"

"Loans," said Todd promptly, "at five percent. But what has that got to do with—"

"The correct answer," I sighed, "is—*shekels!* The sinews of war, lamebrain. Cash. Gelt. Credits. The root of all evil. Filthy lucre. There's a polarium-rush at Europa, which if I'm any prophet will make the old gold-rushes on mama Earth and the radium-rush on Venus in 2078 look like Bargain Day in the Ladies' Basement.

"The Corporation that supplies our bread-and-butter wants in on the ground floor. So we're elected the official claim-stakers."

"Polarium!" echoed Dick. "That's that new element, isn't it? Number 106? The impossible one?"

I stared at his First Officer's stripes sourly.

"When I think of the genius who used to wear those stripes," I sighed, "and then look at *you*— Oh, well! Listen to papa, whackypot. Polarium is Element No. 106, yes! But it ain't impossible, no! Because they found it. And I have yet to hear of anybody finding anything which doesn't exist. It's a brand-new discovery, apparently rare as ideas in that spongy bulb you hopefully call your 'brain,' and it's *so* new that nobody knows, yet, exactly what its properties are.

"Nevertheless, it's got a cash value. So we're on our way to collect some of the aforesaid same."

Todd said aggrievedly, "That's not a very nice way to talk to a superior officer, Sparks. Damned if I wouldn't report you —if I had any idea who to report you to. But—Europa, you said? That's kind of dangerous, isn't it? Our attempting to land there, I mean."

"No more dangerous," I told him, "than attempting to brush the teeth of a sabre-toothed tiger. Any time a ship gets within umpteen miles of Jupiter, pal, it's hold your hat and breath and give the prayerbook a quick riffle. That hunk of red goo has gravitational power—spelled with a capital, 'Phew!' More spaceships than you have corpuscles have fallen within old Jupe's drag, crashed on the planet. And not a man has ever yet managed to escape, get back to tell us what it's like.

"From what we know or can guess, the planet is not inhabited or habitable. But

that's guesswork. Until we can explore it as we've explored its satellites, we'll never know. And we'll never be able to explore Jupiter until some clever jasper invents an anti-gravitational shield—"

"Say!" enthused Todd. "Now, there's a great idea, Sparks! I think I'll work on that!"

I looked at him and groaned.

"*You* invent an anti-gravitational shield? What are you going to use for brains? Buttons? I've never known but one man in my life with the genius to pull that miracle—and he's dead. Lanse Biggs. I hope that wherever he is he can't hear you. He'll be rolling over in his grave so fast they'll call him 'Revolving Biggs.' Either that, or he'll come back and haunt you for daring to—"

And then it happened. Todd, who had been listening to me petulantly, suddenly stiffened. His jaw dropped . . . his eyes popped out like marbles on stalks . . . and his hair climbed two full, quivering inches off his scalp.

"S-s-sparks!" he wailed. "D-d-don't say that! Behind you!"

Then he keeled over in a dead faint. I turned. My heart took a running leap for my lips, and I think I screamed. Because I was staring at a thin, wavering nebulosity —a form gray and ghastly—a transparent simulacrum of—

Lancelot Biggs!

WHAT happened next, I wouldn't rightly know. All I know is that for the first time I realized how a deep-rooted tree must feel when a pup comes sniffing at it with malice in his eyes. My brain said, "Get going, babies! Double-quick!" But my pedal extremities were as nerveless as a batch of yesterday's dough.

But there was nothing wrong with my senses. On the contrary: they were as sharp as a creditor's letter. And for the first time in my life I realized that the old stories you hear about ghosts are on the up-and-up. For this shimmering wraith of Biggs carried along with it all the visual, audible and olfactory accoutrements with which the ghosts of lore are usually endowed.

My ears hummed with a high, thin singing; a sort of weird, unearthly harmonic vibration. There was a biting odor in my nostrils, a scent so subtle I could not tell whether it were charnelly repugnant or just plain annoying. The phantom itself was gray, drab, colorless. Immobile. Tense, strained of visage. For a moment its white lips seemed to move—

Then it was gone! As quickly as it had come it was gone, and the paralysis left my limbs, and I was on my knees beside Todd, shaking him.

He came out of his blackout howling. "Did you see him, Sparks? It was Biggs' ghost! Standing right there—"

"What the hell's going on in here?" interrupted the irate voice of Cap Hanson. The door had burst open; he stood in the archway with Diane a few feet behind him. "What's all this, Mister Todd? The two of you groveling on the floor—drunk again, eh? Well, my two fine sirs—"

Todd pulled himself to his feet uncertainly. His voice was cracked, incoherent.

"N-no, sir! S-something horrible. This ship is—is *haunted*, sir! I saw—*Upph!*"

My elbow caught his bread-basket just in time. His next words represented my own private opinion. But I didn't want Diane Hanson to hear them. After all, it isn't soothing to a heartbroken gal to learn that her lover has turned into a noisy, malodorous, spaceship spook.

"Haunted?" roared Hanson. "Are you mad, Lieutenant Todd? What do you mean, haunted?"

I tried to catch the skipper's eye so I could give him the business to lay off the quiz program for the time being. But my

finger-flagging came to naught. Diane shouldered past her father and into the room. Her voice was intense, eager.

"Sparks," she said, "tell me! It was—*he,* wasn't it? Lancelot?"

Too late, Dick understood why I'd poke-checked him. He turned red and began gobbling like a block-bound turkey.

"N-no, Miss Diane. N-nothing like that. Bert and I were just having a little horseplay. We'd had a drink—"

"Don't lie to me, Dick! It *was* Lancelot! It must have been. I—I saw him myself!"

Well! That was one for the books. It was our turn to gape. Cap Hanson stared from one to another of us wildly.

"What's this? You saw Lancelot, Diane? Where?"

"In my cabin. An hour or so ago. I was trying to take a little nap. Something wakened me—I don't know what—and I saw him standing in the middle of the room. He was so pale. So thin, and so sad. Oh, Daddy—"

SHE buried her face on his shoulder. Hanson said, "Now, there, honey!" He looked like an accident hunting for some place to happen. He stared at us dismally.

"Is that the truth, boys? Is that what you saw?"

We nodded. I said, "I'm not what you might call a superstitious guy, Skipper, but I know what I see. It was his ghost, all right."

Todd wailed miserably, "And it was all my fault. I brought the haunt on by bragging—"

"Nonsense!" snapped the Old Man. He wore a worried frown on his pan. He released Diane, took a few swift paces across the room, spun, came back to us. "Sheer nonsense!" he repeated angrily. "It isn't reasonable!"

I said, "Yeah, I know. That's what folks have been saying for centuries, Skipper. That ghosts aren't reasonable. But the fact remains, people *see* them—"

"That's not what I mean. I don't give a hoot about the possibility or impossibility of a ghostly afterworld, I'm just saying that it's not reasonable we should see a ghost of *Biggs!* Lanse wasn't that kind of boy. He wouldn't come back from the—from Beyond for no better purpose than to frighten the living daylights out of his old friends and the woman he loved. He was a logical man—

"Here's what I think! If you saw Biggs—"

"We did!"

"Very well! Then it wasn't his *ghost* you saw! It was some sort of projection of him. Don't ask me what kind, or how he did it, or where he is. But I'll bet my last cent—Lancelot Biggs is not dead!"

The pronouncement galvanized Diane. Her eyes shone and she cried, "Oh, Daddy—do you mean that?" Looking upon her joy, I groaned inwardly. It was cruel of the Old Man to reawaken false hopes in her like that. As I said before, I know what I see. And that vision of Biggs didn't look like the projection of a living man's image. It wasn't flat. It was transparent and tri-dimensional. And filmy—

I opened my mouth to protest. But I never got one chirp out of my peeper. For at that moment the turret audio rasped to life, Chief Garrity's grizzled face gleamed on the screen, and the C. E.'s Scottish burr accosted us with accusing indignation.

"Captain Hanson, sirrr!"

"Yes, Chief?"

"Will ye be so kind as to accept my rrreseegnation, sirrr, *ee*-fective *ee*-meejuttly! I willna ha' fairther dealin' wi' sooch scand'lous nonsense as is now goin' on down here!"

Hanson snarled, "Resignation be damned, Chief! I've got troubles of my own. Don't come bellyaching to me because you can't handle your own men—"

" 'Tisna *my* men are ablatherin'!" declared the Chief in high dudgeon. " 'Tis one o' y'r ain men who by all rights should be dead an' planted these past seven weeks! 'Tis the ghost o' the late Lootenant Biggs —down here tryin' to gie my men orrrders f'r the *con*-struction o' some fantastic machine!"

I THINK we all must have said something, but what I said I can't remember. For I was conscious only of Hanson's exhuberant roar. "See? I told you so!" and of Diane's glad little cry, "Daddy! Let's go down!"—then we were all highballing it down the ramps toward the engine room.

What we found there was Bedlam. Bedlam in greasy overalls. The hypos, hooked up the V-I unit, were perking along in their usual smooth fashion. The rotor-pistons were chugging back and forth in their channels with the calm precision of a five-year-old sucking a lollypop. But in one corner of the room the members of Garrity's black gang were huddled, wide-eyed, white-faced, closer than a duffer and his topped drive; in another corner stood Chief Garrity, staring with speechless wrath at a figure in the middle of the floor.

The figure was that which we had seen up topside. The wavering spectre of Lancelot Biggs.

It's funny how the mind works. Even in that moment of stress I found myself thinking that translation into the afterworld had not done much to improve Biggs' handsomeness. He didn't look much like the chubby cherubs or stalwart angels you see pictures of. He was the same old Biggs I'd known and loved. Tall, gangling, lean to the point of ridiculousness—dressed in space-blues rather the worse, I thought, for wear—tousle-haired, grave-eyed, with that old familiar Adam's-apple bobbing up and down in his scrawny throat like a half-swallowed orange.

There was one difference, though. He was not quiet, motionless, as he had been when I had seen him in my turret. There was a look of fretful anxiety in his eyes. He was gesturing impatiently to his awe-struck watchers, motioning them to approach him. His lips were moving, but no sound issued from them. There was in the air that same high, thin whining I had noted before; that same sharp, rather ammoniac odor.

Then Diane cried, "Lanse! Oh, Lanse, darling—!" and rushed forward. Straight toward, up to, into and *through* the spectre of her lost lover. And she stopped, dazed. Her arms waved wildly. "B-but he's gone! He's not here? Where did he—"

I choked weakly, "D-don't look now, Diane, but you sort of—er—broke him up. Little chunks of him are floating around you."

Which was the God's-honest truth, so help me! When she burst into that phantom, it popped apart like pieces of a jig-saw puzzle.

Shattered into a thousand little shimmering, quivering bits, as an image will shatter in a quiet pool when you chuck a rock into it. Diane stepped back. The hunks of Biggs came drifting back together again. I saw, now, that he wore a happy smile. His lips moved, and we read the name he spoke. *"Diane!"*

Hanson whirled on the scowling Chief Engineer.

"How long has he been here, Chief? What's he want?"

Garrity's reply was as sultry as a Venusian sunset.

"And joost how, Captain Hanson, would I be capable of knowin' the *de*-sires of a disembodied speerit? I'm a mon of broad expeerience, sirrr, but I dinna pretend to comprehend *ee*-cleesiastical mysteries. *Shoo!*" He waved his arms at the ghostly Biggs. "Go 'way, ye bodiless demon! 'From ghoulies an' ghosties an' all sairts o'

beasties an' things thot go "Boomp!" in the nicht, O Laird, deliverrr us!' "

Hanson turned to me in desperation.

"He's trying to tell us something, Sparks. You and him was friends. Can't you understand him?"

I was already pondering that problem. It was plain that Biggs' motions were not purposeless, that he was trying to communicate some message. I stepped forward, facing the wraith, formed short words clearly on my lips.

"Lanse—can you hear me?"

He shook his head.

"But you can read writing?" I had some crazy idea of scribbling messages to him for his perusal. Of course, it was a one-way ticket to the Observation Ward if anybody ever found out I'd been holding a chalk-talk confab with a ghost, but——

He didn't like that idea, either. He raised both arms. Then he did a funny thing He started waving his paws in the air. Left paw—right—right again—left—left—

Todd groaned, and looked for a soft spot to faint on. "Not only a spook," he wailed, "but a *dancing* spook—"

"Shut up!" I yelled. "Cap, shove that alleged Mate through the airlock. This ain't cuckoo—it's *code!* Go on, chum! I'm getting it!"

For:

"S . . . p . . . a . . . r . . . k . . . s, Lancelot Biggs was left-righting to me, "g . . . o . . . t t . . . o b . . . e b . . . r . . . r . . . i . . . e . . . f. Power limited. Tell Chief line inner hull posi-charge steel lining, throw nega-circuit through outer. Have Todd revise course to following trajectory . . ."

I'll spare you the rest. It was all technical. So technical, in fact, that I couldn't make head or tail of it. There wasn't a man aboard the *Saturn* who could. It was, furthermore, absolute proof that we were dealing with no spook, but with L. Biggs himself. For this was typical "Biggsian" mathematics.

And he was right in saying his time was short. He was beginning to fade before he had completed the algebraic and mechanical formulæ he wigwagged to me. Toward the end I had to strain my eyes to find out which hand he was wiggling. But I caught the last waves.

"Follow instructions blindly," he signaled, "and we'll soon be together again. Luck! My love . . . Diane. . . ."

Then he was gone.

BOY, now, I'll tell you the following hours were hectic. Our normal complement is a twenty-men crew, of which only six men are engineers or engine-room helpers. And the job Biggs had laid out for us was weighty enough to stagger the resources of a Patrol repairship.

But Hanson turned on the heat, and when the Old Man shoots the juice, things hop! We drafted everyone on board. Staff, crew, engine-room, Ordinaries—even Slops and the mess boy burned blisters on the pinkies performing the task Biggs had assigned us.

Most of us bent to our labors eagerly. Myself, for instance—I didn't know what Biggs had in mind, or what the final result of our efforts would be. But I knew damned well that Biggs never gave purposeless orders. Some good would be the end of this fantastic webwork of plates, wires and coils we were weaving through, in and about the *Saturn*.

Diane, despite the fact that her hands soon became raw and sore, insisted on doing a share of the manual labor.

"I must, Sparks!" she declared. "I'd never respect myself again if I didn't help in some small way. Because he promised this would bring us together again. Where, I don't know—" She straightened, staring at me speculatively.

"I don't know!" she whispered. "Sparks—he never told us where he is!"

"He didn't have time," I reassured her. "His power was limited, he said. But everything's going to be O.Q."

But later, Dick Todd raised the same point, when I spoke to him in the control-turret. He had been checking the course Biggs had designated. Now, frowning, he laid his computations before me.

"You see what this means, Bert?"

"Yeah," I said, looking at the rumpled sheet. "It means you ought to wash your hands more often. Well, what?"

"This course," said Todd nervously, "sets a direct trajectory to—*Jupiter!*"

I said, "O.Q. So it sets a direct traj—*What did you say?*"

"Jupiter!" repeated Todd miserably. "I've checked and rechecked it. I can't be wrong." He stared at me, small dancing lights of fear in his eyes. "Sparks," he whispered, "that *was* Biggs we saw, wasn't it?"

"If it wasn't," I told him, "I'm a ring-tailed baboon. And no cracks!"

"But everyone seems to be taking it for granted he is still *alive.*" Todd fidgeted nervously. "That his orders will help us, somehow. Suppose—suppose, Sparks, our *first* hunch was right, after all? That Biggs is really dead? And that it *was* his ghost we saw?"

I wet my suddenly dry lips. "Go on!" I said.

"They say the dead are lonely," husked Todd. "And Biggs, who died in the loneliness of negative space might be doubly so. Suppose he wants company. After all, he didn't promise us success. He only said, 'We'll soon be together.' But where, Sparks—where? In this world, or—"

I shook myself savagely. I couldn't deny that his words had given me a bad case of icicles on the vertebrae. I knew something else, though, too. That Lancelot Biggs, alive or dead, had never yet given me a bum steer. And that I, for one, meant to see this thing through—or bust!

Bust! I didn't like that word, either. Not when I thought of our new course, and us blasting hell-for-leather toward massive, crushing Jupiter.

THEN somehow twenty-four hours, Earth standard, had passed. And by labors verging on the miraculous, we had completed the task set before us. And now, with the second part of Biggs' instruction before us, we were standing in the control turret of the weirdly altered *Saturn,* watching the small hand of the chronometer creep toward the thin black mark that represented our deadline.

Cap Hanson, who had been a bulwark of strength when there was work to do, was as squirmy as a hen on a cactus egg now that all we had to do was wait. He paced anxiously back and forth between the control-banks and the visiplate. Once he squinted through the perilens and turned to me nervously.

"You're *sure* you got that message right, Bert?" he demanded for maybe the thousandth time. "You couldn't have made a mistake."

"I could have," I reassured him, "but I'll bet you my pension I didn't. I've been pushing keys for too long not to get my did-da-dits straight, Skipper."

"We're awfully close to Jupiter," scowled the Old Man. "*Awfully* close. I—I don't like it. Not only that—but we're running away from Europa as fast as we can. If the Corporation ever finds out about this—"

"They can't miss," I said. "They know how long it should have taken us to get to Europa. Matter of fact, Cap, we should be landing there right now. We're going to lose a little time in establishing those claims. But if by losing a little time we can find Lanse Biggs again, why—"

"*Awfully* close!" complained the skipper. He turned to Todd suddenly. "Dick—we can't risk it! There must be a mistake somewhere. Jupiter fills all space before us. If we get caught in its gravitational power, we'll all be killed.

"We've got to turn back. Send the message down to the engine room. Reverse motors and lift!"

Diane cried, "Daddy! But Lanse—"

"I'm sorry, honey. But we can't risk twenty lives and a quarter million credits' worth of Corporation property on the hazard of finding one man. Give the order, Mr. Todd!"

Todd said willingly, "Aye, sir!" and reached out to push the audio stud. My heart sank. The needle was almost upon the split second that should have seen us putting Biggs' mysterious plan into operation. I yelled, "Skipper, *please!*"

"Give the order, Todd!" repeated Hanson regretfully.

But Todd's hand never reached the button. For just then there came a terrific, straining lunge of the ship; the floor seemed to slip beneath my feet, I toppled headlong to my knees. Plates groaned and creaked in metal agony. I felt a sensation of wild acceleration, a dizzying sense of speed intensified, plunging us forward—downward—

And Todd cried, "Too late! Too late, Skipper! God help us—we're falling onto Jupiter!"

I TOLD you folks, say I'm hard-boiled. People also claim I'm a wingding. They say lots of things about me—none of them nice. But I'll say this one thing for myself in self-defense. That once in a million times I show a good streak of common sense.

This was one of those times. While everyone else was wailing and hollering and going off the top of their buds, I got smart and carried on.

I roared, "Dammit all, Lanse *knew* this was going to happen, and planned for it. Depress that No. 3 lever, Todd! Shoot the juice through those coils we've been building!"

And Todd was so rattled that he obeyed me. Like I told you before, we'd created a wild-looking network of wires all over the framework of the *Saturn*. We had even constructed a whole new inner hull, juicing it according to some diagram that didn't appear to make sense.

Now rheostats rheostated and condensers condense and the air got so full of electricity that my teeth began to hum like bees in a bathtub. And it got hot in the control-turret. But—

But our frightful plunging motion ceased! Not just like *that*, you know; I don't mean we stopped stock-still and hung motionless in space. But we drifted into an easy glide. A gentle, leaf-in-the-breeze sort of motion.

Cap Hanson's jaw fell down to his fourth button. A gasp worked its way up out of his lumber region. "It—it's impossible!" he said. "I—I don't believe it!"

I didn't either. For what we were seeing mirrored on the turret visiplate was something no man in the universe had ever seen before—and lived to tell about it. We were seeing the troposphere, the stratosphere, the surface atmosphere of the massive planet Jupiter at easy visual range. And we were drifting to solid ground so gently that we were in no more danger than a parachutist approaching a field full of sofa cushions!

It didn't even occur to me, then, to notice how far off the scientist's had been in attributing fantastic characteristics to unstudied Jupiter. Because its density was so much less than Earth's, they had envisioned it as a gaseous or semi-liquid planet. Which was so much hogwash. It was a normal-sized core surrounded by blankets, thousands of miles deep, of atmosphere. It

was lush, luxuriant, green. Steamy with vapors, riotous with vegetable life. Protected by its swaddling clothes, it was the most likely abode of life Man had ever found outside his native Earth!

But as I say, I scarcely noticed this at first. I was conscious only of my own pulse-numbing astonishment, of the casual, lazy motion of our ship, of Captain Hanson gasping beside me in a cracked, incredulous voice, "Anti-gravitation! *He's found it!*"

Our task was not yet done. The instructions called for the lifting and depression of a dozen more studs. But by now, Dick Todd—who is a damn sight better navigator than he is a mental giant—was hunched over his controls playing the intricate keys like a master organist.

In three hours that sped by like as many minutes we had gained the surface of Jupiter. We sought the declension points Biggs' ghost had set forth to us. We hovered over the juncture . . . spotted a small, glistening mote of silver beneath us . . . lowered on our amazing anti-gravitational beam. It was a perfect landing. Less that an eighth of a mile from the lean, gangling, radiant, unspace-suited figure who came racing across the field toward us—

AFTERWARD, when everyone had stopped trying to talk at once, and a modicum of coherence worked its way into our glad reunion, I pressed Biggs for explanations. He grinned in that amiable, modest way of his.

"Why, it wasn't much, really, Sparks," he protested. "I never was lost in hyperspace, or negative space, at all! You see, when I cut myself loose in the life-skiff from the 'infinite mass' of the *Saturn*, in order to reestablish the ship's finiteness, I also made my *own* craft finite again. Which is pure common sense. Anything less than infinite is necessarily finite—"

"Comes the dawn," I groaned. "And I like to think I've got brains. But go on!"

"Well, by sheer accident, the spot in space where I became finite again happened to be here. On the surface of Jupiter. I was pretty much surprised, as you can guess, to learn that this is a definitely habitable planet. Good air, plenty of food and water—no handicaps but its tremendous bulk." He sobered momentarily. "None of the others who ever crashed here survived, I guess," he said. "I've found three or four spaceships, broken to bits—

"Well, anyway—I realized that the only way for me to ever get away was to find some method of counteracting the planet's terrific gravity. And it suddenly occurred to me that the answer lay in a laboratory curiosity created way back in the 20th Century. A piece of magnetized steel that floated within upright supports above a counter-magnetized plate.

"I adapted this principle and gave it a few refinements of my own. The instructions I gave you created a dual magnet-hull for the *Saturn*. Inner hull positively charged, outer hull negative. Counterbalance, you see. The outside of the ship repelled the gravitational attraction of Jupiter so strongly that it could never have landed. The inner hull tempered the effect of the outer so that an easy, drifting motion was obtained. You could vary the speed of this simply by altering the amount of E.M.F. running through the coils—"

"We discovered that," interrupted the Old Man. "But you still haven't told us, son, about your 'ghost.' You like to scared the almighty hell out of all of us. How—"

Lance grinned shyly.

"Well, I can't take credit for that, Skipper. You see, it was sheer accident. I found a deposit of some strange new substance here on Jupiter with the most peculiar properties. The stuff seems to polarize light at its source—and reorganize it

into a tri-dimensional image at a distance which can be controlled by electric power

"When I discovered that my own life-skiff couldn't make the long trip to Europa or Io, I decided to project my image out into space in the hope I'd find someone. The telekaleidoscopic rays—I guess we can call 'em that till we get a better name—are naturally attracted to metals. This cut down the haphazardness of the attempt.

"It was sheer chance, though, that you should be my rescuers. Though I might have known you wouldn't abandon me without a long search. I—I'm mighty grateful to you, sir."

His words struck Hanson like a thunderclap. And the Old Man groaned.

"Omigawd!"

"What's wrong, Skipper?"

"I just remembered—we was supposed to be on Europa twenty-four hours ago! By this time, all the available claims will be gobbled up. When the Corporation learns about this, we're all going to be sunk!"

Diane said indignantly, "Ridiculous! You've made the first landing on Jupiter, Daddy. Surely that should be enough glory for them."

"That's glory," admitted Hanson dolefully, "but it ain't enough glory for *them*. I know this outfit, honey. I been working for them, man and boy, for nigh onto forty years. Their motto is: Get all you can and then some!

"It ain't going to matter to them that we found our lost First, discovered anti-grav, and made the first landing on a new planet. No sirree! They sent us out to find polarium deposits, and if we don't come home with the best claim—"

Biggs said, "Polarium? Did you say polarium, Cap?"

"That's what I said," groaned the skipper. "Now be a good boy, Lanse. Go 'way and let me suffer in peace."

"Why," grinned Biggs, "I don't believe there's any reason to suffer, Captain. Because, you see, that strange new substance I mentioned—the one out of which I constructed my telekaleidoscope—is polarium! There are tremendous deposits of it here on Jupiter. Why not? This is the mother planet of Europa—"

SO—there you are! That's Lancelot Biggs for you. Screwball, genius, wizard and luck-box extraordinary. Toss him in a mud puddle and he'll come up clutching a diamond every time. Not once in a while. Every time.

And I guess it was just about now that the Old Man slipped me the high-sign to drag hips out of there.

"Look, Sparks," he suggested, "how about you and me take a little walk and explore this here new planet?"

I said, "Oh, I'm quite confortable here, Cap—"

He jabbed an elbow into my ribs ferociously. "Are you coming peaceable?" he hissed, or do I have to pull off your leg and beat you over the head with the bloody stump?"

I got it then. Diane and Biggs. They were eyeing each other like two marshmallows ready to melt. So I said, "Well, all right, Skipper. If you want to. 'Bye, folks!"

And do you know—they never even heard me?

"Kill her, sonny—kill her!" "I can't! I can't!"

Parasite Mansion

By MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

Youth is catapulted into the midst of horror generations old!

THERE was nothing about the aspect of that little stretch of Alabama road to warn the girl of disaster. Driving along at a careful forty, the wheels of her battered roadster sunk in deep clay ruts, Marcia Trent had no premonition of evil lurking in that pine coppice just ahead. She was young, modern, red-headed, and furiously angry. Her blue eyes snapped as she drove, alone, through Blue Ridge foothills that shivered under the first touch of winter.

The realization that this mad dash was foolish and dangerous — four hundred miles to Birmingham, when everyone believed she was safe at a girls' school in Carolina—pricked at her conscience now and then; but she thrust it aside angrily. The last train and the last bus had gone when, blinking the tears from her eyes, locked in her dormitory room, she had made up her mind.

And now—the blue eyes flashed—she was two-thirds of the way home . . . to break up her sister's marriage to a man whose engagement solitaire winked up at her from her own left hand!

Marcia compressed her lips and shifted gears, plowing through mud as she rounded a sharp curve.

At that moment something like an angry hornet struck through the windshield of the roadster. It smacked into the leather seat a scant two inches from her shoulder, and a rayed hole glittered in the glass.

The girl screamed, ducked. This time, clearly, she had heard a muffled shout—the crack of a rifle. And that second hole in her windshield was no accident.

Someone was sniping at her from that dark coppice to the left!

Marcia slid low in the car seat, peering over the dashboard and gripping the wheel. Terror was like a hand clutching her throat. She stepped hard on the gas, and skidded around the curve.

And abruptly there was no road stretching before her eyeline. Space yawned as the car skidded and plunged downward. With a crash it slid sidewise over a low embankment. Marcia clawed at the door, tried to jump clear, but pain wrenched at her ankle. Then something hard and solid struck her head, and darkness fell like a black velvet curtain.

She fought to retain consciousness. Distorted visions swam before her eyes. Once a dirty bearded face bent over her, and she gasped at the stench of stale corn liquor. Voices drifted to her ears, faint and disjointed:

A man's voice, gruff and slurred with drink: "You little fool! . . . not to touch that rifle again . . . take us *all* away if you've—"

And a child's voice, frightened and defiant: "I don't care! I don't care! They'll never take Lollie away to that place—I'll kill them! . . . kill everybody who comes here—"

And the man's voice again: ". . . your fault if they do! . . . not dead, just a slight concussion. Oh, hell! Nothing we can do but—"

The car door was jerked open. Weakness and nausea overwhelmed the girl as a dirty hand reached in, tugged at her, lifted her out. Marcia half opened her eyes once, aware of being carried like a baby in strong arms. A chill drizzle of rain wet her face, and the muffled *squish-squosh* of heavy boots in mud kept time with the swaying of the arms that cradled her. She tried to cry out, to squirm from their grasp. But the black curtain fell once more, and the faint sobbing of a child trailed her into oblivion.

WHEN she opened her eyes again, Marcia thought she must be going mad.

There was no wrecked car, no bleak red-clay hills, no dark pine coppice hugging a lonely mountain road. She lay, warm and quiet, in a huge four-poster bed, in a high-ceiled Colonial-type room that would have delighted the heart of an antique dealer. A lighted oil lamp, held close above her, knifed at her aching head; she blinked painfully, trying to see just beyond its radiance.

And then, swiftly, she shut her eyes, trying not to see.

Three faces were bending over her: a small tow-headed boy's—tear-stained, sensitive and violent; a man's face—bearded,

lined by suffering, with somber eyes that held no friendliness. But the third face, Marcia thought wildly, could only be that of a mummy. That wrinkled mask with its hook nose, wispy gray hair and bright shoe-button eyes leered down at her intently. A claw-like hand poked at her hair.

"Pretty! Ay, she's pretty! Eh? Eh, Victor?" a thin voice quavered, taunting with its acid humor. "That why you didn't leave her to die in the car? Eh? Answer me, Victor! Because you're lonesome and sick of hiding out here. Eh? And what happens when you're done with her? You can't send her back."

Marcia shut her eyes tight. She lay stiff and still, praying that her lids would not quiver.

"Don't be a fool, Gran," the man's voice lashed out, thick with drunkenness. "Renny shot at her, made her crack up her car. The Mason family," his tone was bitter, "owes her something for that. Besides," he added callously, "there are bullet holes in the upholstery. If someone noticed them when they found her, they'd be sure to come snooping around here. . . . Oh, damn you, Renny!" he burst out wearily. "Why did you do a crazy thing like that? I told you not to touch that rifle."

"But, Vic, sh-she was slowing down!" the boy's voice whimpered. "They sent her here to get Lollie! I know they did! She can't take her . . . I'll kill her! I'll kill her!" the voice rose to a screech of hysteria.

And Marcia's eyes flew open in terror as two strong little hands fastened about her throat.

Feebly she fought them off, staring up into the white contorted face of the boy. He could not have been over eleven or twelve years old—but for a second time he was trying to kill her!

The bearded man moved swiftly, however. He seized the boy by the hair, shoved him toward the door with gentle force. Sobbing, screaming, the child ran out of the room. Marcia could hear his bare feet running down a long flight of stairs, followed by the distant slam of a door.

There was nothing for it now but to look up at the other two faces, with what false courage she could muster.

"Where . . . where am I?" Marcia forced a stiff smile and sat up. Instantly she fell back as pain knifed at her ankle. "Ooh . . . it's broken!"

The bearded man looked down at her, with no sympathy in his somber eyes. "No," he said crisply. "Just a bad sprain. I strapped it up, and also took a few stitches in your scalp."

Marcia blinked at him. *"You . . .* took—?"

Her head was clearing now. The shabby splendor of the room amazed her, dulled, even though it was, by dust and cobwebs. The bed in which she lay was beautifully made and very old, with pineapple knobs on the posts; but the frayed quilt that covered her was its only bedding. The period furniture was priceless. But rain blew unchecked through a broken pane of the window, drenching an old carved highboy across the room. A rusty blind creaked in the wind and banged against the house. The old place was like a beggar-king, arrogant still in silken rags and a tarnished crown.

The man who stood looking down at her, Marcia thought, was an even greater contradiction. Dirty, half drunk, bearded and unkempt, he yet had the voice and manner of a gentleman. And his hands, washed clean now, were graceful and quick —hands that, he had informed her, had strapped up her sprain and skilfully taken stitches in a scalp cut.

"You're . . . a doctor, then?" Marcia faltered.

The man gave a short laugh. Beside him, the old crone emitted a high squeal

of mirth and squinted up at him, head to one side like an evil bird.

"Doctor! Heh-heh! Are you a doctor, she says, Victor!" One button-eye winked at Marcia, and a scrawny thumb jerked at the man. "Him, a doctor? Not any more, dearie! He's not fit to tend a sick horse—him with his drinkin' and hidin' out here in the hills like a murderer, because o' the black fear that's in him!"

"Shut up, Gran," the man snapped in a tired voice.

SOMETHING like a shadow had crept into his deep-set eyes at the old woman's words. He glared at her briefly, twisting together hands that had begun to tremble. Then he glowered down at Marcia, eyes cold and unfriendly.

"Listen to me," he rapped out. "Those bullets fired into your car were accidental, but I don't expect you to believe that. A . . . a sick child. My little brother, Renfield. He . . . wasn't responsible, but of course it was outrageous. However, the facts are these: I could have left you there with a slight concussion and a sprained ankle. You were off the highway detour, you know. Cars don't take our road once a week; so you'd have had a long crawl to the next farm. As it is, I carried you here and gave you medical attention, free of charge."

He paused, scowling down at Marcia, at her scared blue eyes turned up to him. A slight quiver in her lower lip must have caught his attention, for the harsh voice softened.

"I'm sorry. You're frightened, of course. Don't be; you're quite safe here. I can get your car in running order, and you can be on your way early tomorrow morning. Tonight you'll have to accept—" his mouth twisted again—"such hospitality as we can offer. Tomorrow . . . I'm requesting only that you leave without asking questions about . . . anything you may see or hear in this house. Forget us as though we never existed. Isn't that fair enough?"

"Y-yes. Oh, yes. Anything you say." Marcia nodded terrified agreement. Of course the man was merely trying to fool her, to calm her fears until . . . She bit her lip, determined not to cry with those two hostile faces glaring down at her. "Thank you for . . . helping me," she said brightly. "I'm sure the shooting was . . . accidental. And you've been kind, and I won't say a thing! All I w-want is to get on to Birmingham before they m-miss me at home and at the school I l-left."

The man called Victor, towering over her, gave a grunt of disdain.

"College girl, eh?" he snorted. "What are you doing, driving across country alone—Carolina to Alabama, judging by your license plate?"

Marcia set her teeth with an effort. "Not a college girl," she said with dignity. "I'm twenty-six—an assistant professor of Abnormal Psychology. I . . . I'm studying to be a psychiatrist."

The man laughed aloud, and rubbed his bearded chin.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said bluntly. "A dumb little fluff like you? Now I've seen everything!" The dark eyes narrowed as he spoke. They flicked a glance at the old crone, grinning beside him, then bored into Marcia. "All right," he snapped. "So you're a student-professor of psychiatry. Well . . . let me warn you, don't go practising any of your damned scientific rot around here! . . . Science!" Once more that shadow came into his haunted, deep-set eyes, and his mouth twitched. "Logic! It's fine, it's perfect until we come up against a blank wall. Then all we can do is pretend it's not there. Fantasy! Superstition! Science has hidden behind those words too often, when something that can't be explained—"

He broke off short, aware of the girl's intent gaze on his face. Once more his

eyes went cold, menacing, and a long forefinger jabbed out.

"Just mind your own business while you are here," he warned, "and nothing will happen to you. Stay in this room; don't go prowling—not that you can do very much on that ankle. And if you hear or see things that don't make sense . . . forget 'em! Is that clear?"

With a caught breath, Marcia nodded rapidly. The man grunted, then strode toward the door. On the threshold he paused to scowl back at the old woman.

"Gran," he called harshly, "none of your idle chatter, you hear? Or I'll break your scrawny neck!"

The aged mummy flapped a hand at him, cackling nasally and winking one bird-like eye at Marcia. "Go on with ye, Victor! Out! Go get ye another jug of corn, and come home sotty drunk as usual! Heh-heh! I'd not be tellin' a stranger the Mason family secret, would I? Would I now?"

The man cursed audibly and stalked out, slamming the door hard.

MARCIA relaxed with a sigh of relief. For now, perhaps, she could bribe this senile old woman to let her go before . . . Her eyes strayed to a window, its broken pane stuffed with yellowed newspaper. It was almost dusk. The sky was a dirty smear of clouds, as though a witch had swept it with her sooty broom. Rain slanted against the panes with a faint hiss of sleet. The wind had risen, whining under the eaves like a leprous beggar. Out there, the girl saw with a sinking heart, it would be a long cold hobble on her sprained ankle to the next farm.

But here—in this eery old house, with a bearded derelict, a grinning mummy, and a murderous child — she most assuredly must not wait for night to fall. Gathering her courage, she turned a bright smile on the old hag.

"Look here," her voice was confidential and persuasive, "there's fifty dollars in my purse, in the glove compartment of my wrecked car. If you'll help me get away from here before he . . . he comes back, you can have it."

"Have it? Heh-heh! I got it a'ready!" old Gran cackled with evil mirth. "Renny fetched it to me whilst Victor was fussin' over your hurt. A good boy, that Renny," she crooned. Then the beady eyes narrowed. "If you tell Victor, I'll put the lad onto ye again! He'll do for ye this time, sure enough. Quick and strong, Renny is—if a bad shot. Now, if I was to give him a knife, let's say—"

She squinted at the girl slyly, rubbing bony hands together. But Marcia sat up in bed, oddly steadied rather than frightened by the heavy tone of threat.

"I don't think he wants to hurt me," she said calmly, "except in defense of this . . . Lollie. His sister? I'm beginning to understand a little of this crazy business. Someone has threatened to come and take her away; is that it? Her brother shot at me, thinking I was from . . . the police? No, hardly. Or the county hospital, perhaps? Is Lollie tubercular or something?"

The old crone burst out in another shriek of mirth at that. For a full minute she rocked with nasal laughter, flapping thin arms. Then, without a word, she scuttled from the room, leaving the door ajar on a wide dusty hall.

Marcia, frowning after her, marveled anew at the unkept splendor of the old house, once undoubtedly the pride of an old Southern family. Places like this, she knew, were not uncommon in the Deep South. Impoverished during Reconstruction days, many a family of decadent aristocrats still lived on in old homes like this one. Stubbornly they clung to the furnishings and traditions of a bygone era, though poverty had worked its will on the people themselves. Hope and ambition had

dried up at the spring. Only the stolid will to live kept them alive, bitter and weary and uncaring, in a decaying old mansion that had once rung with music and laughter and the voices of Negro slaves.

But . . . Marcia shook her head. These people, she mused, were not the quitting kind. There was fire and fight in the eyes of that boy Renny, and a savage defiance behind the haunted look of Victor Mason. Poverty and lack of ambition, she felt, were not the cause of their disintegration. Gingerly her hand went to her bandaged scalp, and felt of the strapped ankle. Skilled hands had done that work, not those of a drunken idler. Something else had weakened the spines of these Masons. Some shadow. Nameless and forbidding, hung over this old house into which fate had dumped her on a rainy afternoon. "The Mason family secret," the old hag had called mockingly as Victor went out. What secret?

Quite clearly Marcia knew all at once that Victor Mason, ex-doctor, was horribly afraid of something, as was his nervous violent little brother Renny. Fear like an obscene fungus sprouted from the very walls of this old house. Marcia shivered, hunched down in the huge bed—and her imagination groped with a trembling hand through darkness for what the answer might be. . . .

A slight sound made her glance up, heart pounding.

The half-open door was swinging slowly wider. Marcia stopped breathing. And then her breath came out in a *whoosh* of relief.

A young girl of perhaps sixteen stood in the doorway. Barefoot, dirty, her frail body clad only in a sleeveless one-piece dress of cheap cotton, there was yet an exquisite faery quality about her that made Marcia's heart turn over. Uncombed blond hair fell shoulder-length, framing a thin sensitive face with the dreamy startled eyes of a fawn. Tensed, like a wild thing poised for flight, the girl took a step into the room—and another, and another until she stood a few feet from the bed. She stared at Marcia, lips parted in child-like wonder, hands clasped at her breast.

"Oh, you're pretty!" Her voice was a timid whisper. "You didn't really come to take me away. Did you? And let them lock me up?"

Marcia stared back at her, caught by the girl's delicate beauty. "No, dear," she murmured gently. "Of course not. You're Lollie, aren't you? Renny's sister, and Victor's? Come closer; I won't hurt you. Why should anyone want to hurt you?"

The fawn-eyes flickered toward the door warily, and came back to Marcia, round and trusting. One finger stole out suddenly, timidly, indicating a brilliant brooch at Marcia's throat.

"What's that?" she asked with wonder. "Precious jewels! Are you a princess, like in the picture book?" The soft eyes regarded Marcia with admiration. "You *are* a princess, in disguise! I can tell! And you wouldn't take me away to that place." she asserted with a quick smile of trust. "Renny said you were a mean lady. But he's wrong. You're like the princess in the story—'both beautiful and kind,' it said. I can tell," the blond head nodded solemnly. "I can tell by your eyes and the way you talk. . . . Oh, the pretty jewels!" she clapped her hands. "Red and blue and green and yellow, like a rainbow!"

MARCIA bit her lip, blinking back tears of pity for this lovely young girl with the mind of a child. On impulse, her hands went swiftly to the brooch at her neck, and unfastened it. She did not hold it out; merely laid it on the edge of the bare mattress.

"There, dear," she whispered. "You like it? You can have it. But don't tell anybody—it's our secret!"

The fawn-eyes widened with delight. "Ooh! For me? Now I'm sure you're a princess! Only a really, truly princess would . . . it's mine? To keep?"

One delicate hand stole out toward the ornament; almost touched it. And then an incredible thing happened.

Like a live creature, the brooch leaped suddenly into the air some three feet above the bed. It poised there for a fractional moment, then sailed across the room to crash against the far wall.

The girl Lollie emitted a sharp wail of pain. She jerked back her arm, and then cringed, gripping her right wrist. Marcia stared, stunned.

She herself had not moved. There was no other living creature in the shadowy room. And the nails of the girl's own left hand were broken or bitten off to the quick.

But, nevertheless, four deep scratches were slowly reddening in angry welts on Lollie's forearm. As Marcia looked, blood oozed from them. It ran down the slender wrist and dripped to the dusty carpet.

Lollie stifled a sob. One piteous glance she cast at Marcia. Her lips moved as though she were trying to speak, to explain, but no sounds issued from them. Another sob racked her frail body. Then, with a longing look at the brooch, gleaming where it had fallen in the distant corner, she wheeled and ran from the room.

Marcia huddled in the big bed, wide-eyed and still. Her stunned gaze was fastened on the empty doorway through which the girl had vanished . . . and caught a glimpse of straggly gray hair. Old Gran was peering at her around the jamb. Now, discovered, she popped out, breaking into another of her senile cachinnations and flapping bony hands against her thighs.

"Heh-heh-heh! Scared out'n a year's growth, ain't ye? They all are, them that's ever seen it!"

She scuttled over to the corner, pounced on the brooch, and held it to catch the fading light, bead-eyes glittering brighter than the jeweled ornament. It looked grotesque in that wrinkled mummy-hand.

"My, ain't that fancy! Too fancy for a child—and a crazed one, at that!" she tittered, thrusting the brooch into a pocket of her gray shawl. "And ye'll not tell Victor about this, either!" she added, glaring. "Ye hear? If ye do, he'll beat Lollie for comin' up here to see ye when he told her not. Ye wouldn't want to cause her hurt, now would ye, dearie? Besides, if Vic knows ye saw her, he might not let ye leave here . . . so ye won't be tellin' him, will ye, dearie?" she asked slyly.

Marcia gulped, and shook her head like one dazed by a blow. The weird events of the past few minutes had bewildered her. But rapidly her logic and common sense were coming to the rescue, thrusting out in every direction for a spark of sanity in this mad household.

She glanced down at the ring on her finger, and her lip quivered uncontrollably. Jim, her Jim, and Alice were marching up the church aisle about now, to the strains of *Lohengrin*. And back at the school, no one would miss her until Monday classes. Here in this old house in the mountains she could be swallowed up, and no one would ever know what had become of her and her battered little roadster. Perhaps, before Lollie's visit, she had had a chance to escape alive. But now, apparently, she had seen too much. When Victor Mason came home! Someone would tell him; he would know. . . .

Miserably she sought for a possible means of escape. Why would they want to keep her here? To insure her silence, of course—silence about some secret this old house held. Those scratches on the girl's arm, the fear in all their eyes, and the antics of that jumping brooch: it all added up, she was certain, to a weird mystery that smacked of the supernatural.

Something here, something no more tangible than a shadow, had changed a skilled young doctor into a drunken hermit, a healthy intelligent little boy into a nervous killer, and this fine old home into a haunted hovel. That appealing girl-child called Lollie—the mystery centered about her, Marcia was sure. And as long as it remained a mystery, for a stranger like herself to chatter about when she left, she would never get out of this old house alive.

She sat up in bed, blue eyes snapping with sudden purpose.

Here before her was a riddle—which, solved, might mean her freedom. And no young woman who dared study the science of psychiatry could look herself in the face again if she was too terrified even to attempt its solution!

Marcia looked at Gran. The old hag was squinting at her again; she had just spied the diamond solitaire, and was staring at it greedily.

"I want that, too!" she rasped, jabbing out a bony finger at the ring. "Give it to me, quick—or ye'll not leave this house alive. I'll set Renny onto ye! I'll give him a knife."

Marcia tensed. All her senses were alert now, wrestling with her problem. There was also a burning desire to help that dryad of a girl, Lollie—and a barb of curiosity — to stiffen her spine and sharpen her wits.

Now, obediently, she tugged at the ring to pacify this absurd old woman. "I can't get it off," she lied. "You'll have to get me soap and water, or a file. Tell me about Lollie, won't you . . . er . . . Gran? Isn't that what they call you? Your grandchildren?"

The old hag spat with surprising venom. "Victor and them? Ha! Them spineless Masons! A pack of fools, the lot of 'em . . . and they're no kin of mine, except by marriage. 'Twas Aubrey Mason I married, their great-uncle and the biggest fool of the lot. A smart woman could wrap him around her finger. Which I did!" she cackled. "Which I did! His fine womenfolks yelped and fumed their heads off, but he married me—right off the streets, in Mobile! Not good enough for 'em, I wasn't. And now," she tittered with shrill secret mirth, "now they're not good enough for me! They've rotted away at the root, these high-and-mighty Masons . . . and it's fear that's rotted 'em! Fear!"

She stopped short, glaring suspiciously at Marcia as though apprehensive that she had said too much. Wrinkled lips writhed back from toothless gums.

"It's no business of yours!" she snarled. "What are you questionin' me for? Get that ring off! Give it to me, quick, before—"

SHE broke off again, cocking her head sidewise in a listening attitude. Then, muttering, she scuttled from the room.

A moment later a tall saturnine man, clean-shaven and dressed in a cheap dark suit, strode in from the hall. At Marcia's expression, he smiled wryly and rubbed his chin.

"Yes, Miss . . . Trent, by your driver's license," Victor Mason drawled. "You're thinking I look almost human without the beard, eh? Thank you. First time I've dressed and shaved in six months. You should be honored!"

Marcia looked up at him, caught a gleam of sardonic humor in the dark eyes, and smiled. It was a bright intimate smile. Many a young male had assured her it was irresistible. But Victor Mason snorted.

"Trying feminine wiles on me now, are you?" he laughed shortly. "Hoping to cajole me into not keeping you here? Please don't bother!" he snapped coldly. "I have no intention of detaining you, Miss Trent, any longer than I can possibly help. Your

car wasn't damaged much. Just a blow-out, a bent axle and a crumpled fender. I have a man working on it now—one who'll overlook the bullet holes."

"Oh! Thank you! I—" Marcia began in a rush of relief.

"Just now, though," Mason continued coldly, "I'm worried. It's Renny. He seems determined to finish what he started, the minute he gets a chance. He's hiding somewhere around the house now. Until I find him and lock him up in the woodshed, I suppose I'll have to act as your bodyguard. Damned nuisance!"

Marcia shrugged, hiding her worried look, and continued to smile. She patted her hair, straightened her collar. If only he did not learn about Lollie's visit!

"You know," she said coolly, "I believe you're the rudest man I ever met, Doctor Mason. At first I was afraid of you. But now, since I've discovered that *you* are horribly afraid, too . . . of something . . . I'm not frightened any more. Your little brother? Neurotic. That's why he tried to shoot me, and—"

She stopped with a gasp of dismay. Victor Mason's eyes, which had drifted from her face, were suddenly riveted on the dusty carpet. Two bright drops of blood glistened there. The man's head jerked up, eyes narrowed, glowering at Marcia.

"Lollie!" he burst out. "She's been in here, hasn't she? The little idiot, I warned her! I'll—"

"You'll beat her?" Marcia flashed, indignant. "You'd punish that poor sick child?"

The man frowned. "Beat Lollie? Whatever gave you that idea? I'd break anybody in half," he grated, "who tried to lay a hand on her! I wouldn't hesitate to . . . kill you in cold blood, Miss Trent, if I thought you were going to make her unhappy, intentionally or otherwise." He shrugged, laughed wearily. "There, you see? I love my sister quite as much as Renny. "I've devoted my life to helping her—but I've failed miserably. There's nothing a man, a blundering scientist, can do . . . against—"

HE BROKE off, that shadow of horror darkening the deep-set eyes. His mouth twitched, and the graceful surgeon's-hands twisted together in anguish. Abruptly he whirled on Marcia.

"What did you see?" he rasped. "How much do you know? Oh hell! I knew if I brought you here . . . Now," he stated flatly, "you can never be permitted to leave. That's that. Your promise of silence isn't enough. You'd break it—and I can't take that chance for Lollie."

Marcia nodded gently. "I understand," she said. "If her case were reported to the authorities, the child would be committed to . . . an institution for the insane. I've read of such cases," she whispered, awed. "It's . . . demoniacal possession, isn't it? When her . . . seizures recur, she's affected with . . . Dr. Mason, I've heard of stigmata, but I never thought I'd see a case so remarkable. It occurs most often in religious fanatics, so I've read. There was a case in Vavaria only last week. The woman, upset by war news, broke out with wounds similar to those of Christ on the Cross. Medical records tell of dozens of other cases.

"There was also a little Rumanian girl who broke out with 'bites' and 'scratches' like those inflicted by a large cat. *Dermographism,* that's the medical term. And when it is accompanied by *hyperemia,* the stigmatic wounds actually bleed. Extreme hysteria causes the skin to react to imaginary blows, and cuts and weals will appear as though the victim has actually been struck.

"Your sister, Lollie . . . I saw her arm break out with such wounds that bled. The attack was accompanied by temporary *aphonia,* too — hysterical loss of speech.

Oh, the poor darling! If only there were something we could do to help her!"

Victor's savage look faded. Curiously he peered at Marcia, undecided for a moment. Then, as if driven by a surge of despair, he took one stride and sat down on the edge of the great bed.

"I've misjudged you," he blurted. "You are kind . . . and you also seem to be a level-headed young woman, Miss Trent. I . . . I . . . you've studied psychiatry. Tell me, frankly, does Lollie seem to be a mental case?"

Marcia met his eye thoughtfully, and shook her head.

"No, Doctor Mason. She seems a rather bright child, though undeveloped. Too sheltered, naturally. She must be extremely nervous, to be afflicted with stigmata. But . . . no; I wouldn't say she was insane. Just badly frightened—like the rest of you! What is it you're afraid of, here in this house?"

The man's eyes darkened. His mouth twitched; he steadied it with an effort.

"We're afraid of . . . *It,*" he said flatly. "The . . . the Thing that scratches her. Oh, yes, Miss Trent," he gestured bitterly, "talk about stigmata till you're black in the face! I've studied it. I can quote you case histories you never heard of. At least two more, anyhow," he muttered. "My Aunt Silvia, and my great-aunt, Anne. You see, we Masons have lived with this Thing for three generations. It's been handed down, always affecting the youngest, most high-strung daughter. That's the hideous thing. It isn't new. It's been with us so long . . . and yet we've never been able to get to it or do a thing toward . . . destroying it."

HIS voice trailed off dully. Marcia opened her mouth, shut it with a snap.

"Doctor Mason," she exploded, "you're not hinting that you believe there actually is something that . . . that scratches Lollie! Of all the silly superstitious rot! Why, an intelligent medical man like yourself—"

Victor Mason snorted. "Superstitious!" he laughed harshly. "That's what we've been hearing all our lives! Stigmata! Nervous hysteria. Listen, Miss Trent—it isn't only those welts on Lollie's flesh that make me believe the unbelievable. There are other phenomena. Inanimate objects move and go flying through the air, in a room where Lollie is. Small objects that a . . . a creature about the size of a monkey might pick up and throw."

Marcia stiffened. She was remembering that flying brooch. But a recoiling spring in the mattress, logic told her, could easily have catapulted the ornament across the room. Only her disturbed fancy had made it seem to move so slowly, to hang there in midair for a moment. For the thing could not have flown across the room by itself—nor could any ghostly hand have thrown it. The idea was ridiculous.

But a look at Victor Mason's haunted eyes sent a chill down her spine.

"I've tried so hard and so long," he was saying wearily. "I gave up my interneship in a New York hospital and came home when . . . when Lollie . . . I was twenty-two then. She was nine. For seven years I've worked on her here, studied, tried everything under the sun. I . . . I've even hired a professional ghost-breaker to try and exorcise the thing. But it's no use."

"Why don't you send her to a good private sanitarium?" Marcia demanded. "I should think—" She broke off.

Victor Mason stood up with a jerk, and glared down at her. "There!" he snarled. "I knew you'd say that! They all do. Send her away, lock her up in a padded cell for observation by a lot of crackpot neurologists! Miss Trent, my great-aunt Anne died in an asylum. Aunt Silvia killed herself rather than be sent back to one. Poor little Lollie lives in terror that she'll be

dragged away from us and locked up like an animal . . . for nothing! Your damned scientists can't do a thing for her; they never did anything for Anne or Silvia! Because, you see, it's not a nervous hallucination. The Thing is real."

Marcia shook her head, exasperated. "You actually believe that?"

Mason nodded. "I do. In adolescence, this . . . this demon attached itself to Anne, then to Silvia when Anne died. It got Lollie sooner because she was always a nervous child. It's like an invisible parasite! It will live, attached to her, until she dies—just as it lived with Anne and Silvia Mason.

"That case in Rumania that you mentioned: a young girl, possessed or haunted by a sort of 'familiar spirit.' They called it a *poltergeist*—a mean, prankish spirit, not really dangerous, just annoying and nerve-racking like a bad-tempered monkey. That," he intoned, "is what we Masons have been living with for three generations. We've had the choice of believing we were either haunted or insane—with everyone we knew blandly telling us the Thing simply doesn't exist. That's made us rather anti-social," Mason drawled bitterly, "trying to live a normal life outside and a madman's existence within our home. Gradually it's sapped our strength and ambition until we're—" His mouth twisted. "Well, you see, Miss Trent. Poor-white trash; that's what we've become. We have no friends, and . . . frankly, our only income is from the bootleg corn that I distill and sell. We've shut ourselves off from the world, with only one thought: to make Lollie's life as bearable as possible under the circumstances. So now you know," he added flatly, "why I can't take the chance of your leaving here and talking. Sensation-mongers would overrun us tomorrow if Lollie's case were made public. Then some officious busybody would insist on her being sent to the state asylum for 'medical aid' . . . and she'd kill herself, or die of sheer terror."

The ex-doctor passed a hand over his bloodshot eyes. Marcia, her heart sinking, stared at him. But the man's face was cold, determined.

"I don't know what to do. Murder," he drawled, doesn't appeal to me. But if you attempt to leave here now, I'm afraid it's my only alternative, Miss Trent."

Marcia shivered, then steadied herself with an effort.

"I can keep my mouth shut," she said. "But I see you don't believe that. All right, Doctor Mason: My only chance then is to . . . break this ghost that's been breaking you all these years; is that it? I don't believe in goblins. I can't believe that poor child is haunted by an invisible being that scratches her and throws things. There's a scientific explanation for the stigmata; you admit that much. Well, then—there must be a reason for those objects sailing through the air.

"It sounds like the supernatural, I know. But so did television, to people of Shakespeare's time. If a parachute jumper had dropped from a plane in a Twelfth-Century village, he'd have been burned at the stake. But the witchcraft of today is the science of tomorrow, Doctor Mason. Look here. Will you let me be around that poor child, Lollie, tonight? I have reason to believe she likes and trusts me, and I may be able to help her. May I try? Not," she burst out sincerely, "just to get myself out of this jam, but because I feel desperately sorry for Lollie, for all of you, and want to help you—believe it or not!"

The shadow-ridden eyes of Victor Mason bored into her face, troubled and uncertain. But Marcia's blue ones did not waver; and a half-smile twisted the bitter mouth. Mason thrust out his hand.

"You're a good sport," he sighed. "Of course, there's nothing you can do. I . . . wish I dared trust your silence. But Renny

and I live for Lollie, you understand. We can't let any other emotion conflict with our efforts to help her."

MARCIA nodded. "I understand. But you'll send her to me, so I can—?"

The former doctor frowned thoughtfully. Then, on sudden impulse, he flipped back the quilt and lowered Marcia's feet to the floor.

"I'll do better than that," he shrugged. "You're going to be here from now on, so you might as well get a quick dose of what it's like. Dinner was nearly ready when I came up. I planned to send you up a tray, but . . . well, with Renny on the loose, you'd better eat with us. Think you can hobble downstairs?"

Leaning on the man's proffered arm, Marcia stood up painfully. "I think I can make it," she grimaced. "But—maybe your grandmother—or great-aunt, I believe she said—maybe she won't like my dining with the family. I don't think," she added carefully, "that she likes me much."

"Who, Gran?" Mason laughed, and shrugged. "Oh, Gran doesn't like anybody. She's the black sheep of our family. Married a weak-willed ancestor of ours, after a rather lurid past, and the family never received her. She's lived in the house here, though, hating us like hell because marrying Great-uncle Aubrey didn't automatically make her a lady! But . . . she's watched us deteriorate, and likes to rub it in. Gran's the only one of us, I suppose, who hasn't let this business get her down. She just calls a ghost a ghost, and lets it go at that!"

"I see," Marcia murmured. "Yes, she's quite a character!"

She glanced up at the weary sardonic profile beside her. Leaning on Mason's arm, she managed to limp down a long, curved staircase, deep in dust and cobwebs like every other part of the big house. Down a long hall they went, and across a rotting screened porch to the isolated kitchen in the rear.

"We live in the kitchen and keep the rest of the house closed," her host explained as he shoved open the door.

Marcia hobbled in. The kitchen was huge, cluttered but fairly clean. On the side opposite a big wood stove an unpainted table was set—for five. Then Marcia thought, the old woman had expected her after all.

But, as they entered now, Gran turned from the stove and peered at her in surprise. She leered at Mason.

"Well, Victor!" she quavered. "Have ye lost your mind? Want her to see everything, eh? Want her to blabber about Lollie all over the state? Eh? Eh?"

Victor Mason dismissed her with a look. "She's not leaving," he snapped. "Miss Trent is staying with us . . . indefinitely; and I suspect you, Gran, of sending Lollie up there to see her. Set another plate—the damage is done, and she'll just have to stay."

He helped Marcia into a straight-backed kitchen chair, on his right at the head of the table. A dingy frayed cloth that had once been fine damask covered the unpainted boards. The dishes, Marcia noted, were a strange mixture of exquisite china and ten-cent-store crockery. The knives and forks were of cheap steel, but the spoons—of thin silver, with an "M" monogram—hinted of the lost splendor of a bygone era.

Now, in spite of that fifth place already laid, the old crone planked down another plate in front of Marcia. Sidling to the door, she called out, like a screech of rusty hinges:

"Renny! Lollie! Come and eat!"

There was a sound like bare feet running. Marcia braced herself as the boy Renny burst in, spied her, and stopped short, glaring. But apparently hunger overrode his hostility for the moment, for he

slid into the chair on Victor's left. Gran sat at the foot of the table. . . .

They waited. And presently, stealing in with a fawn-like hesitancy, the girl Lollie came. Across from the vacant place she slid into her chair and sat, wide-eyed, staring at Marcia with child-like admiration.

"She's not a mean lady—she's a golden-haired princess, isn't she, Vic?" she burst out in delight, then turned wistfully to Marcia. "What happened to the jewel? I wanted it so! It was so pretty, all rainbow colors . It . . . *ooh!*"

The cry was wrung from her, and a hand flew to her face. Already an angry welt was appearing along her cheek—inflicted by no means that Marcia could see.

Tears welled up in the wide brown eyes. Lollie huddled, silent, in her chair. For a moment she sat there, gulping back tears. Then forlornly she took a piece of corn-pone, a spoonful of rutabaga turnips, and began to eat with quick nervous gestures.

In the table's center was a lone brandied peach in a compote. Now, spying it, the girl put out an eager hand for the morsel, turning to her older brother.

"Could I . . . have that?" her lips formed.

Victor nodded, smiled tenderly, and then shoved the compote toward her. Beaming again, child-like, Lollie took the peach on her plate. But, as Marcia watched, she carefully cut off a tiny piece. This fragment she popped into her mouth with relish.

Then, reaching across the table to that vacant place, the girl laid the larger piece on the empty plate. Her brown eyes regarded it longingly for an instant. But, with a faint sigh, she went back to her turnips and corn-pone.

Marcia turned to her host, the question plain in her eyes. His reply was a bitter smile, and a shrug.

"But," Marcia whispered, "surely you don't actually set a place at the table for . . . for the—?"

HER words were cut short, for at that moment pandemonium broke loose.

A salt-and-pepper set on the table began to dance madly. Without warning they rose two feet above the tablecloth and dangled there in midair for a split second. Then, with vicious force, they flew at Lollie's head.

The girl ducked as from long practise. But at once a veritable barrage of silverware flew at her. Cups and plates danced, now at one end of the table, now at the other. The compote turned over, spilling peach juice all over the cloth. Then something rattled in the nearby cupboard, and from that direction another barrage of silverware flew at the cowering Lollie.

Marcia stared, unable to move. Victor and Renny sat like stone images, while Lollie cringed and whimpered in her chair, shielding her head from the weird onslaught. Only old Gran rocked and yelled with mirth, as if the Thing were a puppet show staged for her express enjoyment.

"He's mad! Ye've angered him again, Lollie—he wanted all of the peach!" she cackled, poking a finger at the morsel on the plate. "Ay, he's a mean one, that *poltergeist* of yours. Ye'd best give him his own way!"

Sobbing, speechless, the girl slid from her chair and ran out into the rainy dusk. A silver spoon flew against the screen door, seconds behind her—propelled, from beside Marcia's plate, by no more visible force than the air about her.

Victor Mason pushed back his chair and stood up, his face bleak. The haunted eyes were fixed on Marcia's white face grimly.

"Well?" he snapped. "You saw it, Miss Trent. That's the shadow in our house. For three generations we've lived like this, plagued by . . . something that science declares non-existent. We've had to stand by and watch three young girls of our family tormented by it every day, unable to help them. I daresay if I should marry,

the Thing would attach itself to my daughter after Lollie's death. The same with Renny. So . . . normal life is impossible to us, as you see.

"We'll just have to go on living like this, shut off from everyone, for my sister's sake; seeing her suffer, defenseless against its rages and selfish whims . . . God!" he groaned through clenched teeth. "Do you imagine *you* can help her, when I've given my every waking thought to it?"

The boy Renny stared at them; Marcia could feel his intent eyes on her face. Old Gran had snatched the fragment of peach and was eating it, tittering to herself the while. And outside, like a voice suddenly given this mysterious Thing they had seen at work, the wind rose with a sound like mocking laughter.

Marcia laid down her piece of corn bread, her appetite gone. She leaned back in her chair, looking up at Mason.

"First Anne, then Silvia, now Lollie!" he was muttering. "The hell they went through, locked up in the asylum, with a lot of fool doctors picking at them eternally! Then they'd 'get better.' Those fools! Yapping about stigmata and hallucinations! You see, few strangers have ever seen the *poltergeist* perform, as it did tonight, Miss Trent. So the psychiatrists at the institution insisted it was only a hallucination, accompanied by stigmatic neuropathy. We could never convince them there was more to it than just the stigmata. So they'd send our girls home again—'cured'! And the *poltergeist* would start all over again. You see," he gestured wearily, "it's just a choice of Lollie's being miserable, locked in a cell, or fairly contented living here with us . . . and It. There's no cure . . . because it's not a disease, Miss Trent. It's a . . . a living demon."

Sleet hissed against the panes. Marcia shivered, but her eyes were narrowed with thought. Suddenly they gave Mason a keen look.

"Tell me," she demanded. "Were any of your women ancestors haunted by a *poltergeist* before your great-aunt Anne?"

VICTOR MASON shook his head. "No, it started with Anne—Grandpa's and Great-uncle Aubrey's young sister. Then there was Dad's sister, Silvia. And now it's Lollie. I know now that it will never leave us, so long as there's a young girl with Mason blood in her veins."

Marcia shoved back her chair and stood up with an effort. A faint, grim smile lit her blue eyes. They were bright with purpose.

"Not if we destroy it," she drawled. "Doctor Mason, I have a hunch that your Mason *poltergeist* will leave tonight . . . and never come back. You see," she stated calmly, "I believe I know what makes him tick. I . . . won't tell you now, but in the morning, just before I leave," she added mildly. "Perhaps you can trust me not to tell your secret then, because there won't be any."

Deliberately she looked at the glowering boy Renny, at the smirking old woman, at the ex-doctor.

Victor Mason stared at her. Then, bitterly, he snorted. "Grandstanding, eh?" he snapped. "Well, that won't win you your freedom either. Let me warn you, it's twelve miles to the next farm . . . and they are friends of mine! I was right about you the first time!" he flared. "You're a selfish, featherbrained little fool! You don't care what happens to us or to my sister, so long as you get away from here unharmed! But get that out of your head, Miss Trent. You're not going to leave this place, and that's final."

Marcia's courage wavered. But her chin jerked up again, blue eyes flashing. "Take me to my room now, please," she said coldly. "I'm not bluffing, though: I've cornered your pet ghost—and he knows it!"

MOUNTING the dusty staircase again, however, her heart sank. The old house was so big and still! From the ceiling a spider dangled unexpectedly in front of her face. And as they reached the upper hall, a lean gray rat slithered into the shadows. Marcia gasped and clung to Victor Mason's arm, but his smile was derisive.

"You'll get used to it here," he drawled. "And you'll cease to fight after awhile, as we all have."

He shoved open the door of her room and helped her to the big bed. Darkness was falling, so he lit a smoky oil lamp standing on the highboy. With a shiver Marcia sank down on the bed, sat looking up at Mason's sardonic face. He misunderstood her expression of fear, and snorted.

"If you're worried about my . . . bothering you," he muttered, "please don't. From now on, you're just another sister of mine, held prisoner in this house by something none of us can help. I—"

Marcia laughed aloud, nervously. "Oh, it's not you I'm worried about, Doctor Mason. I can see you consider me just a nuisance, an unfortunate accident.

The tall man smiled wryly. For a moment his haunted eyes held a wistful expression. "Do I?" he murmured. Then, crisply: "Of course," he snapped. "Then what are you afraid of?"

Marcia took a deep breath. "I'm afraid for my life," she blurted. "You see, I . . . . I deliberately put myself on the spot down there when I said I knew the secret of your *poltergeist*. I think I do know *what* causes it . . . but we must have proof. So . . . Doctor Mason, will you take that room across the hall and . . . and come at once if I scream for help? I have a feeling there'll be an attempt to murder me tonight!"

Victor Mason squinted at her, and then emitted a short laugh. "Renny, you mean? I rather thought Lollie's attitude toward you at dinner changed his opinion . . . but of course," he jeered, "if you're afraid of the boy, I'll play sentry. That is," he laughed callously, "if I don't fall asleep. Night watchmen shouldn't tank up on mountain corn, as I've been doing these seven years!"

With a twisted smile, he strode out, closing the bedroom door behind him. Marcia huddled in the big bed, wrapped in the single quilt, and sat listening tensely for a long time. The storm had subsided, but rain dripping from the eaves had the sound of stealthy footfalls. Her nerves crisped at every creak of old walls and the skittering of rats in the attic.

Then exhaustion bore down on her. Her eyes closed, jerked open, closed again. . . .

She awoke with a sick feeling of not knowing where she was. The big room was gloomy and full of shadows that writhed and danced when a gust of wind reached the oil lamp. Marcia blinked, rubbed her eyes . . . and her breath caught in her throat as the tiny sound that had waked her came again.

The doorknob was turning slowly. Now, as she stared, the door swung softly open. Renny Mason, his boyish face contorted, sidled into the room. And the lamplight gleamed on something gripped in his childish fist . . . a long-bladed cane-knife.

LYING on her back, Marcia steeled herself not to move, but lay watching with half-closed eyes. She bunched her muscles for a leap as the boy tiptoed nearer and nearer the bed. Now he stood glaring down at her, knife poised. . . .

But the ugly weapon did not strike. Renny's chin quivered suddenly. His arm lowered. With a sob of defiance he faced the door. In the hallway a shadow moved, hissed urgently.

"I can't! I can't!" the boy whimpered. "She d-doesn't look like a mean lady! She—"

The door swung wider. Marcia almost cried out as the old crone, Gran, scuttled

into the room. Her wizened face was a mask of hate and cruelty.

"Kill her! Cut her throat, you coward!" she rasped. "You want her to tell everyone and have them come for Lollie? Eh? Where she'll be locked in a dark cell, and never see daylight? Where they'll torture her and starve her? Kill that spying little fool, then, and shut her mouth! Kill her, sonny!"

The boy hesitated, turned back to the bed, knife raised. Then, with a dry sob, he flung the weapon to the carpet and cowered against the bed.

"I won't! I won't kill her!" he gulped, trembling. "She wouldn't hurt Lollie! I . . . I like her. And she gave Lollie a pretty jewel, only the *poltergeist* took it and gave it to you. . . . I won't kill her! I'm sorry I tried to shoot her!"

Marcia lay, frozen, watching the old woman. The mummy face was hideous now, quivering with fury.

"Disobey me, will ye?" she snarled. "All right, young mister! Ye'll be sorry for it, that ye will!"

Suddenly the beady eyes seemed to glow like live coals. The old hag tensed—staring, Marcia saw, not at Renny but at the fallen knife. . . .

Without warning, the weapon rose into the air, as though caught by a gust of wind. Up it went, with the old woman's eyes fixed on it. Ceiling-high, it poised, dangling above Marcia's unprotected body on the bed.

The knife fell—with a swifter motion than was natural to any law of gravity. But at the same instant, Marcia screamed and threw her body sidewise. The pain that it caused her sprained ankle was excruciating, but it saved her life.

Hilt-deep, the cane knife stuck up in the mattress where her stomach had been the instant before.

And Victor Mason, blinking bloodshot eyes, stumbled into the room.

"Wh-what's going on?" he muttered sleepily, and spied the knife. His eyes widened. Renny! Boy, you didn't . . . you couldn't!"

MARCIA steadied herself with great effort, swung her feet to the floor, grimacing with pain. "No, Doctor Mason," she managed. "He . . . didn't do it. The knife was dropped from the ceiling, by no visible hand. The *poltergeist* again. But . . . where's your sister?"

"Why," Mason blurted, "she's locked in her room downstairs. We always lock her in at night. Seems to make her feel safer. But . . . the *poltergeist?* It's never thrown things before without Lollie in the room."

Marcia shook her head, bewildered. Her eyes traveled from Doctor Mason to the sobbing Renny. They flickered to old Gran, crouched by the door, mouthing obscenities.

"Then it . . . isn't Lollie who causes it," the girl whispered. "It isn't you, Doctor Mason—or you, Renny. So . . . it must be . . . it's got to be—"

She broke off with a gasp of certainty, for the old hag had recoiled as though she had been struck. The wrinkled lips writhed. The mummy hands lifted with a jerk, claw-like fingers pointing at Marcia in the manner of a hypnotist.

And a dozen small objects abruptly hurtled through the air—a comb from the dresser, a bud vase from the table, Marcia's compact.

From all over the room, as though blown by an unfelt wind, the eery missiles flew straight at Marcia's head. She cowered, trying to shield her face. A small Godey's print, wrenched from the wall, struck her forehead, and she cried out. Gran shrieked with laughter.

"You! I'll fix ye, good and proper! Ye meddlin' little fool!" the old woman snarled. "See that? There's precious few can do it! See? See?"

From where they had fallen, the small objects flew at Marcia again.

As suddenly they dropped. Gran choked, eyes bulging. She sagged against the door, clutching at her heart. Then, buoyed up by a last spurt of venom, she jeered at the staring trio.

"Ay!" she gasped. "It was me! It's always been me and no other! *'Poltergeist!'* Heh-heh-heh! All these years I've made them believe in it and feel it and almost see it—Anne, and Silvia, and Lollie, all as thought they was better than me! Fools—"

Marcia gaped at her, sickened by the cruelty in that old face.

"I see!" she whispered. "I understand now! Oh, it's diabolical, Doctor Mason! You said she married into your family by trickery; and she was furious at being snubbed by your womenfolk. She hated all you Masons as a symbol of what she wanted to be but never could. Hate was like poison in her veins. So she set out to break you, to destroy you little by little.

"Your Great-aunt Anne must have been a sensitive, high-strung young girl, easily bullied and frightened by something she could not understand. And Gran here had a peculiar talent to scare her with! It's bestowed on very few people at birth. Certain wizards of ancient times could do what she did just now; also a few professional mediums of today. It's called the power to 'levitate.' Some kind of electrical wave in the body of the subject can be directed at small objects with such force as to move, lift or throw them a short distance. I happened to read an article about it, okayed by the Society of Psychic Research. Science knows very little about the phenomenon; but then, we have much to learn about telepathy and hypnotism. In the next century we may know as much about the electrical powers of the human body as we have learned about radio in this century."

Victor Mason gaped at her, then at the mouthing old woman. "I don't understand," he mumbled. "You mean, there's no—?"

"No *poltergeist,* and there never was any," Marcia nodded. "But this fiendish old woman has created such a strong illusion of one that you've all believed it. She must have levitated objects around Anne Mason until she frightened the girl into believing she was haunted by a demon. By subtle suggestion that the Thing might scratch her, she got the girl into such a hysterical state that stigmata appeared. When you told me the *poltergeist* didn't throw things where strangers could watch, Doctor Mason, I suspected what it was. I guessed *who,* too, when you said there had been no 'haunted' Mason before Gran's advent. Genuine psychic phenomena can be witnessed by anyone.

"But your great-aunt here was too clever to risk detection. She confined her performances to your terrified family, or to those few whom she thought too stupid to suspect anything. At the asylum, of course, the *poltergeist* never did perform—because Gran wasn't around. So the doctors concluded that that part was only a hysterical hallucination of Anne's, or Silvia's.

"Their stigmata, however, kept on even when not accompanied by the other Thing, the levitating. Naturally the girls were still hysterical, even under treatment. Without the flying objects to scare them, they gradually got better and were sent home 'cured.' What the psychiatrists couldn't know, of course, was that the *poltergeist*—in the form of your great-aunt—was waiting to begin its reign of terror all over again. You see?"

The ex-doctor leaned weakly against the bed, his arm around his little brother's shoulder. They stared, stunned, from the girl to the old hag.

"It's so inhuman," Marcia shuddered, "I can hardly believe it myself! Those innocent high-strung young girls, thinking, they

were haunted by a demon . . . when they were only being tortured by a wicked sadistic old woman with—well, call it a supernatural power to levitate small objects.

Some day, perhaps, the general public will understand and control the same power.

"Your great-aunt used it to good advantage! She's frightened and bullied all you Masons, using the *poltergeist* to enforce her selfish whims . . . like that brandied peach tonight, that Lollie wanted so badly. And the jeweled brooch she stole from me, after I tried to give it to your sister. And the way she tormented Lollie by 'throwing' things at her, to make you and Renny suffer from your inability to protect the child. . . . Oh! You diabolical old witch! Three helpless young girls—"

She whirled on the old woman, sick with indignation.

GRAN cowered against the door, tittering. Her beady eyes flickered from the girl to Renny, to Victor's stunned face. And she broke out in a wild cackle of mirth.

"Ay, it's true!" she shrilled. "A pack of fools, the lot of ye! I've had my way in this house, for all your hoity-toity manners! *Poltergeist!* 'Demon!' Heh-heh-heh! . . ."

The beady eyes bulged suddenly, and Gran clawed at her throat, panting. With a strangled sound she slid to the floor in an ugly heap. Victor Mason, moving like one hypnotized, strode to her, knelt, and felt her pulse. He stood up, shaking his head.

"She's dead," he whispered. "Heart attack. But . . . I can't believe it!" He turned to Marcia, bewildered. "That stupid old woman! All these years!"

With a gesture of repugnance he covered Gran's evil face with her shawl and did not look at her again.

Marcia shrugged. "She wasn't stupid; she was fiendishly clever. Oh, those poor girls! And Lollie! If only someone had guessed!"

She broke off as Renny, who had slipped from the room unnoticed, came back at that moment, leading his fawn-eyed sister by the hand. In his other hand was Marcia's purse. His boyish face puckered, fighting tears, as he thrust it out to her. Smiling gently, she took out the brooch and slipped it into Lollie's hand.

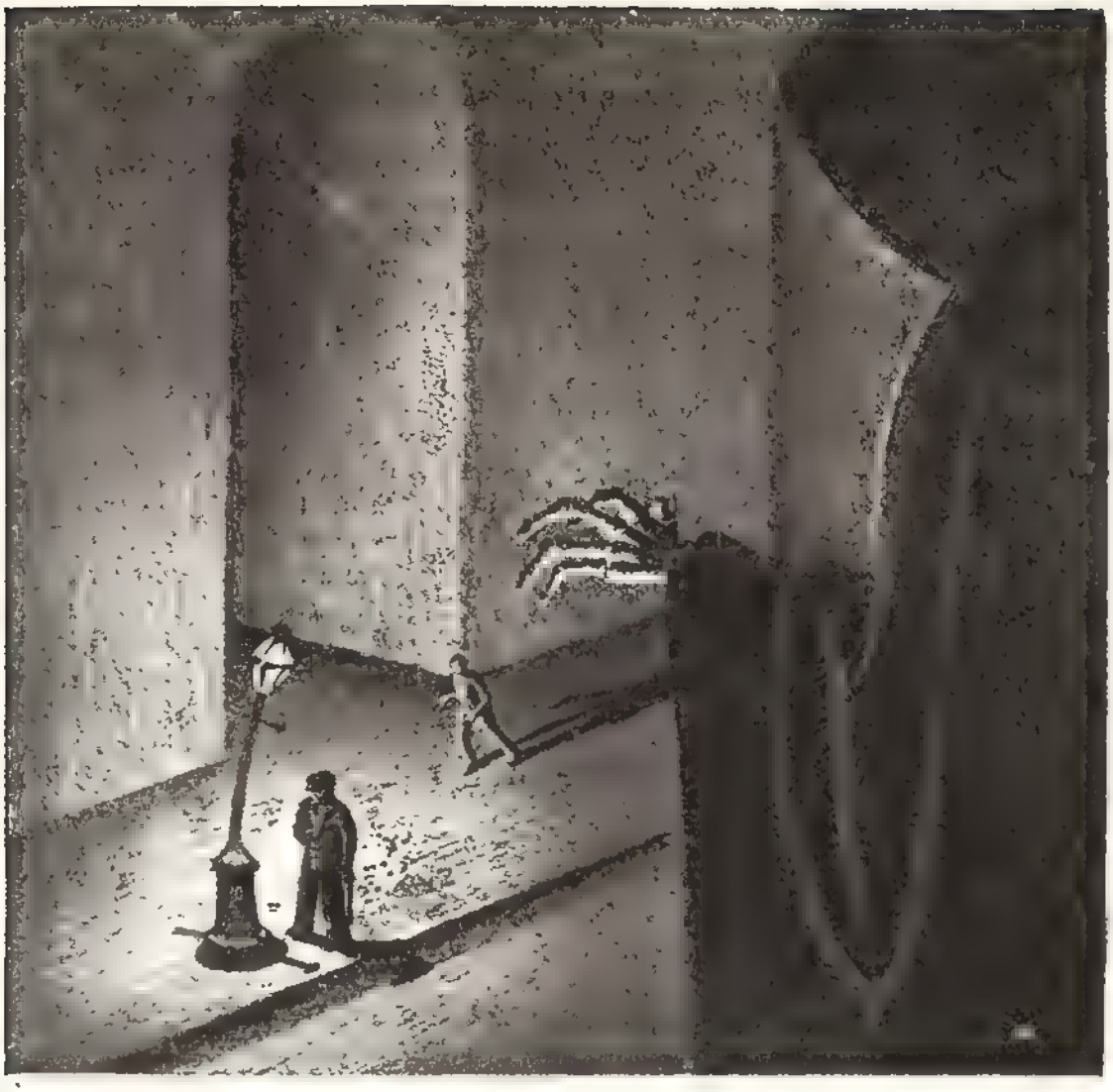
Lollie gasped in delight. "For me? I can have them now? Oh, look, Vic! Look, Renny! The pretty jewels—they're mine too . . . *ooh!*"

Pain flashed across her face, and she jerked back her hand. Four angry weals were appearing along her forearm again. Renny and Victor Mason stared at them fearfully. But Marcia smiled, and put a protective arm about the girl, shaking her head.

"Don't be afraid, dear," she soothed. "The *poltergeist* is dead. It can't hurt you. . . . Just the stigmata," she whispered to Mason. "A nervous reflex, and nothing more. Poor child.

"It will be a long time before you can get the child back to normal. But . . . you must do it, Doctor Mason. It's your incentive to start life over again. Now you'll stop drinking, perhaps build yourself a country practise. And Renny must go to school; Lollie too when she's better. You have no shadow to hide now in this lovely old house."

Victor Mason raised his head. The despair in his dark eyes had given way to a clear alert look, full of hope and a deep gratitude . . . and something else. Marcia saw it and lowered her eyes hastily to Lollie's upturned face. But she heard the tall doctor chuckle softly, like a man with a purpose—like a man awakened in a sunlit room from a long and horrible nightmare.



The Phantom Slayer

BY FRITZ LEIBER, JR.

His ghastly shadow hung over block upon block of dingy city buildings —and his theme song was the nervous surge of traffic along infrequent boulevards . . .

"SO THIS is the room?" I said, setting down my cardboard suitcase. The landlord nodded. "Nothing been changed in it since your uncle died." It was small and dingy, but pretty clean. I took it in. The imitation-oak dresser. The cupboard. The bare table. The green-shaded drop light. The

easy chair. The kitchen chair. The cast-iron bed. "Except the sheets and stuff," the landlord added. "They been washed."

"He died unexpectedly, didn't he?" I said in a sort of apologetic voice.

"Yeah. In his sleep. You know, his heart."

I nodded vaguely and, on an impulse, walked over and opened the cupboard door. Two of the shelves were filled with canned stuff and other supplies. There was an old coffee pot and two saucepans, and some worn china covered with a fine network of brownish cracks.

"Your uncle had cooking privileges," the landlord said. "Of course you can have them too, if you want."

I went over and looked down three stories at the dirty street. Some boys were pitching pennies. I studied the names of the stores. When I turned around I thought maybe the landlord would be going, but he was still watching me. The whites of his eyes looked discolored.

"There's twenty-five cents for the washing I told you about." I dug in my pocket for a quarter. That left me forty-seven cents.

He laboriously wrote me a receipt. "There's your key on the table," he remarked, "and the one for the outside door. Well, Mister, the place is yours for the next three months an' two weeks."

He walked out, shutting the door behind him. From below came the rackety surge of a passing street car. I dropped down into the easy chair.

People can inherit some pretty queer things. I had inherited some canned goods and the rent of a room, just because my Uncle David, whom I never remembered seeing, paid for things in advance. The court had been decent about it, especially after my telling them I was broke. The landlord had refused to make a refund, but you could hardly blame him for that. Of course, after hitch-hiking all the way to the city, I'd been disappointed to hear there was no real money involved. The policeman's pension had stopped with my uncle's death, and funeral expenses had eaten up the rest. Still, I was thankful I had a place to sleep.

They said my uncle must have made his will just a little while after I was born. I don't think my father and mother knew about it, or they'd have mentioned it—at least when they died. I never heard much about him except that he was my father's elder brother.

I vaguely knew he was a policeman, that was all. You know how it is; families split up, and only the old folks keep in touch, and they don't talk to the young folks about it, and pretty soon the whole connection is forgotten, unless something special happens. I guess that sort of thing has been going on since the world began. Forces are at work that break up people, and scatter them, and make them lonely. You feel it most of all in a big city.

They say there's no law against being a failure, but there is, as I'd found out. After a childhood in easy circumstances, things got harder and harder. The depression. Family dying. Friends going off. Jobs uncertain and difficult to find. Delays and uncertainties about government assistance. I'd tried my hand at bumming around, but found I lacked the right temperament. Even being a tramp or a sponger or a scavenger takes special ability. Hitch-hiking to the city had left me feeling nervous and unwell. And my feet hurt. I'm one of those people who aren't much good at taking it.

SITTING there in my dead uncle's worn, old, easy chair with night coming on I felt the full impact of my loneliness. Through the walls I heard people moving around and talking faintly, but they weren't

people I knew or had ever seen. From outside came the mixed-up rumbling and murmuring of a big city. Far away I could hear a steam-engine grunting heavily; nearer, the monotonous buzz of a defective neon sign. There was a steady thumping from some machinery I couldn't identify, and I thought I heard the whine of a sewing machine. Lonely unfriendly sounds, all of them. The dusty square of window kept getting darker, but it was more like heavy smoke settling than a regular evening.

Some trivial thing was bothering me. Something unconnected with the general gloominess. I tried to figure out what it was, and after a while it came to me suddenly. It was very simple. Although I usually slump to one side when I sit in an easy chair, I was now leaning straight back, because the upholstery was deeply indented toward the center. And that, as I immediately realized, must have been because my uncle had always leaned straight back. The sensation was a little frightening, as if he had somehow taken hold of me. But I resisted the impulse to jump up. Instead I found myself wondering what sort of man he'd been and how he'd lived, and I began to picture him moving around and sitting down and sleeping in the bed, and occasionally having some friend from the police force in to visit with him. I wondered how he passed the time after he was retired.

There weren't any books in sight. I didn't notice any ash-trays, and there wasn't a tobacco smell. It had probably been pretty lonely for the old man, without family or anything. And here I was inheriting his loneliness.

Then I did get up, and started to walk around aimlessly. It struck me that the furniture looked sort of uncomfortable all stuck back against the walls, so I pulled some of it out. I went over to the dresser. There was a framed picture on it, lying face down. I took it over to the window. Yes, it was my uncle, all right, for "David Rhode, Lieutenant of Police, retired July 1, 1927," was inscribed on it in small, careful handwriting. He had on his policeman's cap, and his cheeks were thin, and his eyes were more intelligent and penetrating than I'd expected. He didn't look so old. I put it back on the dresser and then changed my mind and propped it up on top of the cupboard. I still felt too nervous and sickish to want anything to eat. I knew I should have gone to bed and tried to get a good rest, but I was on edge after the day at court. I was lonely, yet I didn't want to take a walk or be near people.

So I decided to put in some time looking through my inheritance in detail. It was the obvious thing to do, but a sort of embarrassment had been holding me back. Once I started, I became quite curious. I didn't expect to find anything of value. I was mostly interested in learning more about my uncle. I began by taking another look at the cupboard. There was canned stuff and coffee enough for maybe a month. That was fortunate. It would give me time to rest up and hunt for a job. On the bottom shelf were a few old tools, screws, wire and other junk.

When I opened the closet door I got a momentary shock. Hanging against the wall was a policeman's uniform, with a blue cap on the hook above and two heavy shoes jutting out underneath, and a night stick hung alongside on a nail. It looked lifelike in the shadows. I realized it was getting dark and switched on the green-shaded drop light. I found a regular suit and an overcoat and some other clothes in the closet—not many. On the shelf was a box containing a service revolver and a belt with some cartridges stuck in the leather loops. I wondered if I ought to do anything about it. I was puzzled by the uniform, until I realized he must have had

two, one for summer, the other for winter. They had buried him in the other one.

This far I hadn't found much, so I started on the dresser. The two top drawers contained shirts and handkerchiefs and socks and underwear, all washed and neatly folded but frayed a little at the edges. They were mine now. If they fitted me, I had a right to wear them. It was an unpleasant thought, but there was no getting away from it.

The third drawer was filled with newspaper clippings, carefully arranged into separate piles and bundles. I glanced at the top ones. They all seemed to be concerned with police cases, two of them fairly recent. Here, I figured, was a clue to what my uncle did after his retirement. He kept up an interest in his old job.

The bottom drawer contained a heterogeneous assortment of stuff. A pair of spectacles, a curiously short, silver-headed cane, an empty briefcase, some green ribbon, a toy wooden horse that looked very old (I wondered idly, if he had bought it for me when I was a baby and then forgotten to send it) and other things.

Quickly I shoved in the drawer and walked away. This business wasn't as interesting as I'd expected. I got a picture of things all right, but it made me think of death and feel shivery and lost. Here I was in the midst of a big city, and the only person I felt at all close to was three weeks buried. The personality of the room was getting a tighter hold on me all the time.

Still, I figured I'd better finish the job, so I pulled out the shallow drawer under the table top. I found two recent newspapers, a pair of scissors and a pencil, a small bundle of receipts in the landlord's laborious hand, and a detective story from a lending library. Would they want me to pay the rental on it? I guess they would not insist.

THAT was all I could find. And, as I thought it over, it seemed very little. Didn't he use to get any letters? The general neatness had led me to expect a couple of boxes of them, carefully tied in packets. And weren't there any photographs or other mementoes? Or magazines or notebooks? Why, I hadn't even come across that jumble of advertisements and folders and cards and other worthless stuff you find somewhere in almost every home. It suddenly struck me that his last years must have been awfully empty and barren, in spite of the clippings and the detective story.

There wasn't any knock, but the door opened and the landlord stepped inside, moving softly in big, loose slippers. It startled me and made me a trifle angry—a jumpy sort of anger.

"I just wanted to tell you," he said, "that we don't like to have any noise after eleven o'clock. Oh, and your uncle used to cook at eight-thirty and five."

"Okay, Okay," I said quickly and was about to add something sarcastic when a thought struck me.

"Did my uncle keep a trunk or box in the basement, or anything like that??" I asked. I was thinking of letters, photographs.

He looked at me stupidly for a moment, then shook his head. "No. Everything he had is right here," and he indicated the room with a sidewise movement of his big, thick-fingered hand.

"Did he have many visitors?" I asked. I thought the landlord hadn't heard this question but after a while he came to and shook his head.

"Thank you," I said, moving off. "Well, good-night."

When I turned back he was still standing in the doorway, staring sleepily around the room. Again I noticed how the whites of his eyes were discolored.

"Say," he remarked. "I see you've moved the furniture back the way your uncle had it."

"Yes, it was all up against the walls, and I pulled it out."

"You put his picture back on the top of the cupboard."

"That's where it used to be?" I asked. He nodded, looked around again, yawned and turned to go.

"Well—" he said, "sleep well."

The last two words sounded unnatural, as if dragged out with prodigious effort. He closed the door noiselessly behind him. Immediately I had snatched the key from the table and was locking it. I wasn't going to stand for him prying around without knocking, not if I could help it. Again loneliness closed in on me.

So I had rearranged the furniture in the old pattern, and put the picture back in its proper place, had I? The thought frightened me a little. Made me think I was getting too near the dead policeman and his habits. I wished I didn't have to sleep in that ugly cast-iron bed. But where else could I go with my forty-seven cents and my lack of gumption?

I realized suddenly, that I was being foolish. It was perfectly natural that I should feel a little uneasy. Anyone would in such queer circumstances. But I mustn't let it get me down. I would have to live in this room for some time. The thing to do was to get used to it. So I got out some of the newspaper clippings that were in the dresser and began to go through them. They covered a period of twenty years or so. The older ones were yellow and stiff, and cracked easily. They were mostly about murders. I kept turning them over, looking at the headlines and here and there reading a little. After a while I found myself plunged into accounts of a "Phantom Slayer" who killed wantonly and for no apparent motive. His crimes were similar to those with which the uncaught "Jack the Ripper" horrified London in 1888, except that men and children, as well as women, were numbered among his victims. I vaguely remembered hearing about two of the cases years ago—there were seven or eight altogether. Now I read the details. They were not conducive to pleasant thought. My uncle's name was mentioned among the investigators in some of the earlier cases.

That was by far the biggest pile of clippings. All the piles were carefully arranged, but I couldn't find any notes or comments, except a tiny scrap of paper with an address on it, 2318 Robey Street. It puzzled me. Just that solitary address without any explanation. I planned to look it up some day.

IT WAS night outside now, and the upward slanting light from the street lamp made it easier to see the dust on the window-pane. There weren't so many noises coming through the walls, just the low, sharp drone of some radio voices. I could still hear the buzz of the defective neon sign, and another engine was puffing in the distant yards. To my relief, I found I was getting sleepy. As I undressed and hung my clothes on the kitchen chair. I found myself wondering if my uncle had arranged his in the same way: coat over the back, trousers over the seat, shoes underneath with the socks tucked inside them, shirt and tie draped on top of the coat.

I opened the window three inches from the top and bottom, then remembered that I seldom opened my bedroom window from the top. Was I conforming to my uncle's custom here, too? I was thankful I still felt sleepy, and able to conquer the faint desire I had to keep glancing over my shoulder. I pulled back the covers of the bed, switched off the drop light, and quickly jumped in.

My first thought was, "Here his head lay." I wondered if he died in his sleep like they told me, or if he waked paralyzed, an old man alone in the dark. That wouldn't do, I told myself, and tried to think of how tired and tense my muscles were, of how good it was to rest my feet and be able to stretch and relax. That helped a little. As my eyes became accustomed to the semi-darkness, I noted the dim outlines of the objects in the room. The chair piled with my clothes. The table. A queer little highlight reflected from my uncle's picture on top of the cupboard. The walls seemed to press in close.

Gradually my imagination went to work picturing the great city beyond the walls, the city I hardly knew. I visualized block after block of dingy buildings, with here and there clusters of higher structures, where the stores and the street-car lines lay. The great looming masses of warehouses and factories. The dismal expanse of track and cinders in the railroad yards, with the rank and file of empty cars. Lightless alleys, and the nervous surge of traffic along infrequent boulevards. Row after row of ugly two story frame houses, crowded close together. Human forms that, in my imagination, never walked upright, but slunk through the shadows close to the walls. Criminals. Murderers.

Abruptly I broke off this train of thought, a little frightened at its vividness. It was almost as if my mind had been outside my body, spying and peering. I tried to laugh at the idea, so obviously a result of my tiredness and tension as I told myself. No matter how alien the city seemed, I was here safe in my little room with the door locked. A policeman's room. David Rhode, Lieutenant of Police, retired July 1, 1927. I dozed and fell asleep.

My dream was simple, vivid, and singularly realistic. I seemed to be standing in a cobblestoned alley. There was an unpainted fence with a board fallen from it, and beyond it the dark brick wall of an apartment building with outjutting back porches of wooden framework painted gray. It was the hour of dawn, when life is at low ebb and sleep clings everywhere like a chilly mist. Formless clouds hid the sky. I could see a yellow shade flapping out of a window on the first floor, yet I could not hear the sound. That was all. But the feeling of cold fear that got hold of me was difficult to describe. I seemed to be looking for something and yet afraid to move.

The scene changed, although my emotions remained the same. It was night, and an empty lot, with a great billboard shutting off the harsh light of the street lamp from most of it. Dimly I could see the things in the lot: a pile of bricks and old bottles, some broken barrels, and the stripped wrecks of two automobiles, their fenders rusted and broken away. Weeds and rank grass grew in the sprawling clumps. Then I noticed there was a narrow, bumpy path crossing the lot diagonally and along it a little boy was moving slowly, as if he had come back to look for something he had lost earlier in the evening. The horror brooding over the place was directed at him, and I felt terribly afraid for him. I tried to warn him, to shout and tell him to run home. But I could not speak or move.

Again the scene changed. Again it was the hour of dawn. I was standing in front of a two-story stucco house, set back a little from the street. There was a neat lawn and two flower beds. A block away I could see a policeman slowly walking his beat. Then a force seemed to take hold of me and move me toward the house. I could not resist the force. I saw a cement walk and a coil of hose and then, in a kind of little nook or recess, a huddled form. The force bent me down toward it and I saw

it was a young woman, that her skull was beaten in and her face splotched with blood. Then I struggled and tried to cry out, and I made a great effort and came awake.

FOR what seemed a long time I lay tense and afraid to move, feeling my heart pounding in my throat. The dim room swam around me, and figures moved about, and for a while the window wasn't where it should be. Gradually I got control of my panic, and forced things to return to their normal forms by looking at them closely. Then I sat up, still shivering. It was one of the worst nightmares I could remember having. I reached for a cigarette and lit it shakily, and pulled the bedclothes around me.

Suddenly I remembered something. That stucco house, I'd seen it before, very recently, and I thought I knew where. I got out of bed, switched on the light, and riffled through the newspaper clippings. I found the photograph, all right. The house was the same as the one in my dream. I read the caption. "Where Girl Victim of Phantom Slayer Was Found." So that was what had caused my nightmare. I might have known it.

I thought I heard a noise in the hall outside, and I jumped to the door to make sure it was still locked. As I returned to the table I realized I was trembling. That wouldn't do. I had to conquer that silly fear, that feeling someone was trying to get at me. I sat down and puffed at my cigarette. I looked at the clippings on the table. Had my uncle used to set them out in that way, study them, ponder over them? Did he ever wake in the middle of the night and sit up, waiting for sleepiness to return? Strongly I felt his presence in the personality of the room. I didn't want to feel it.

Abruptly I got to my feet, swept the clippings into one big pile, and returned them to the dresser. By mistake I opened the bottom drawer and saw again that queer conglomeration of objects. The spectacles, the silver-headed cane, the empty briefcase, the green ribbon, the toy horse, the tortoise-shell comb, and the rest. As I shut the clippings away, I again thought I heard a faint noise, and whirled around quickly. This time I didn't go to the door, since I could still see my key in it, unmoved. But I couldn't resist the temptation to look inside the closet. There hung the blue uniform, the cap above, the shoes below, the night stick at one side. David Rhode, Lieutenant of Police, retired July 1, 1927. I shut the door.

I knew I had to get hold of myself. I rehearsed in my mind the obvious and logical reasons for my mood and those unnerving dreams. I was tired and unwell. I hadn't had much sleep for two nights. I was in a strange city. I was sleeping in the room of an uncle whom I had never seen or remembered seeing anyway, and who had been dead for three weeks. I was surrounded by that man's belongings, by the aura of his habits. I had been reading about some particularly gruesome murders. Reasons enough, surely!

If only I could get rid of the conviction that someone was trying to get at me! What could anyone want with me? I had no money. I was a stranger. If only I could get rid of the feeling that my dead uncle was trying to warn me about something, trying to tell me something, make me do something!

I stopped pacing up and down. My glance caught the table top, worn and covered with scratches, but bright under the drop light. It was not quite bare though. I hadn't forgotten any of the clippings, but near one corner lay the scrap of paper I had discovered earlier in the evening. I

reached for it and again read the penciled address, 2318 Robey Street.

I can only explain the strange feeling that gripped me by saying it was as if I had for an instant been plunged back into the atmosphere of my dreams. In dreams, perfectly commonplace objects can be invested with an inexplicably horrible significance. It was that way with the slip of paper. I had no idea what the address meant, yet it stared at me like some sentence of doom, like some secret too terrible for a man to know. With a single, quick clutch of my fingers I crumpled it into a ball, dropped it to the floor, and sank down onto the edge of the bed. God help me, I thought, if I went reacting to things in this way. The beginnings of insanity must be like that.

Presently my heart stopped pounding and things got a little clearer in my mind. My senseless terror was subdued, but I realized it might come back at any moment. The thing to do was to get to sleep again before that happened, and take a chance on the dreams.

Once again as I lay in bed, I felt the pressure and the presence of the room. Once again I saw the whole city around me. I had a sensation of a breaking down of walls and of floating over an alien expanse of dingy buildings. It was stronger this time.

AND then the dream returned. I seemed to be at a meeting of two streets. On my right hand loomed tall structures with many windows, none of which showed a light. On my left hand flowed a broad, ugly river. In its oily, slow moving surface were dimly reflected the street lamps on the opposite side. I could see the outlines of a moored barge. One of the streets followed the river and, a little way beyond, ducked under the approach of a bridge made of great steel girders. It was very dark under the bridge. The other street went off at right angles. The sidewalk was littered with old newspapers, swirled there by the wind. I could not hear their rustling, nor could I smell the chemical stench I knew the river must be exuding. A sick horror seemed to hang over the whole scene.

A small elderly man was approaching along the side street. I knew I must cry out to him, warn him, but I was powerless. He was looking around uncertainly, but I could tell that had nothing to do with my presence. He was carrying a briefcase, and he tapped the torn newspapers out of his way with a silver-headed cane. As he reached the intersection, another figure stepped out from behind me. It was a dark indistinct figure. I couldn't make out the face. It seemed to be wrapped in shadows. The elderly man's first look of frightened apprehension turned to one of unmixed relief. He seemed to be asking questions and the other, the dark figure, to be making replies. I could not hear their voices.

The dark figure pointed down the street that led under the bridge. The other smiled and nodded as if he were expressing thanks. Fright and terror held me in a vice. I exerted all my will power, but could neither speak nor move closer. Slowly the two figures began to move along the river's edge, side by side. I was like a man frozen. Finally they disappeared in the darkness under the bridge.

There was a long wait. Then the dark figure returned alone. It seemed to see me and move toward me. Terror gripped me and I made a violent effort to escape from the spell that held me.

Then, abruptly, I was free. I seemed to shoot upward at a fantastic speed. In an instant I was so high above the city that I could see the checkerboard of blocks, like a map through smoked glass. The river was no more than a leaden streak. Off to

one side I observed tiny chimneys spurting ghostly fire—mills working a night shift. A feeling of terrible and frantic loneliness assailed me. I forgot the scene I had just witnessed on the river bank. My sole desire was to flee from the limitless emptiness in which I was poised. To flee, and find a place of refuge.

At this point my dream became both more and less realistic. Less, because of my impossible swimming and swooping through space, and my sensation of being disembodied. More realistic, because I knew where I was and wanted to get back to my uncle's room, in which my body lay sleeping.

Downward I shot like a stone, until I was only a hundred feet above the city. Then my motion changed and I skimmed over what seemed to be miles of rooftops. I noted the soot-covered chimneys and oddly shaped ventilator, the ragged tar-paper, the rain-streaked corrugated iron. Larger buildings—offices and factories—loomed up ahead of me like cliffs. I plunged straight through them without retardation, glimpsing flashes of metal and machinery, corridors and partitions. At one time I seemed to be racing a street car and beating it. At another I hurtled across several brightly lighted streets, in which many people and automobiles were moving. Finally my speed began to lessen and I swerved. A dark wall came into view, moved closer, engulfed me, and I was inside my uncle's room.

The most terrible phase of a nightmare is often that in which the dreamer believes himself to be in the very room in which he is sleeping. He recognizes each object but it is subtly distorted. Hideous shapes peer from the darker corners. If he then chances to waken, the dream room is for a time superimposed on the real room. That was the way in my case, except the dream refused to come to an end. I seemed to be hovering near the ceiling, looking down. Most of the objects were as I had last seen them. The table, the cupboard, the dresser, the chairs. But both doors, the one to the closet and the one to the hall, were ajar. And my body was not in the bed. I could see the crumpled sheets, the indented pillow, the blankets flung back. Yet my body was not in the bed.

Immediately my feelings of terror and loneliness rose to a new pitch. I knew that something was dreadfully wrong. I knew that I must find myself quickly. As I hovered, I became aware of an insistent tugging, like the pull a magnetic field exerts on a piece of iron. Instinctively I gave way to it and was immediately drawn out through the walls into the night.

Again I sped across the darkened city. And now the strangest thoughts were whirling through my mind. They were not dream thoughts but waking thoughts. Horrible suspicions and accusations. Wild trains of deductive reasoning. But my emotions were dream emotions—helpless panic and mounting fear. The house tops over which I skimmed became dingier, grimier and more decrepit. Two-story houses gave way to sagging huddles of shacks. Coal dust choked the clumps of sickly grass. What ground showed was bare or heaped with refuse. My speed lessened and simultaneously my fear mounted.

I noted a dirty sign. "Robey Street," it read. I noted a number. I was in the 2300 block.

"2318 Robey Street."

The address written on the slip of paper in my uncle's dresser.

It was a ramshackle cottage, but neater than its neighbors. I turned off back of the house, where the muddy alley was and the dim shapes of packing cases.

It was at this time I began to realize I wasn't dreaming.

There was a light in the back of the

house. The door opened and a little girl stepped out, carrying a small tin pail with a cover on it. She wore a short dress and her legs were thin and her hair was straight and smoky yellow. She turned back for a moment in the doorway and I heard a coarse female voice say, "Now mind you, get over there fast. Your Pa likes to have his food hot. And don't stop on the way and don't let nobody see you." I could hear again.

The little girl nodded meekly and started toward the dark alley. Then I saw the other figure, the one crouching in the shadows at a spot that she must pass. At first I saw only a dark form. Then I came nearer. I saw the face.

It was my own face.

I hope to heaven no one ever sees me as I looked then. The indolent mouth twisted up into something between a grin and a snarl. Nostrils twitching. The nondescript eyes bulging from their sockets so that the white showed all around the pupils. More animal than human.

The little girl was coming nearer. Waves of blackness seemed to oppose me, driving me back, but with one last despairing effort I threw myself at the distorted face I recognized as my own. There was one supreme moment of pain and terror, and then I realized I was looking down at the little girl and she was looking up at me. She was saying, "My, but you scared me. I didn't know who you were at first."

I was in my own body and I knew I wasn't dreaming. Ill-fitting clothes cramped my waist and shoulders, pulled at my wrists. I looked down at the lead-weighted night stick I held in my hand. I reached up and felt for the stiff visored cap on my head, then downward, where in the dim light I could see that I was wearing the dark blue uniform of a policeman.

I do not know what my reaction would have been, if I hadn't realized that the little girl was still staring up at me, puzzled, half-smiling, but frightened. I forced my lips to smile. I said, "It's all right, little girl. I'm sorry I scared you. Where does your pa work? I'll see that you get there safely and I'll bring you home again."

And I did that.

Mercifully, my emotions were exhausted, paralyzed, for the next few hours. By questioning the little girl cautiously. I found out the way to the section of the city in which my uncle's rooming house was situated. Afterwards I managed to return there undetected and strip off those hateful clothes, hang them in the closet from which I had taken them.

Next morning I went to the police. I told them nothing of my dreams, my uncanny experience. I only said that the queer assortment of objects in the bottom dresser drawer, in conjunction with the things mentioned in the clippings, had awakened certain ghastly suspicions in my mind. They were unwilling to believe, and obviously skeptical, but consented to a routine investigation, which had startling and conclusive results. Most of the objects in the bottom drawer, the silver-headed cane and the rest, were identified as having been in the personal possession of the victims of the "Phantom Slayer," and as having disappeared at the time of the murders. For example, the cane and briefcase had been carried by an old man found dead under a viaduct near the river; the toy horse had belonged to a boy murdered in an empty lot; the tortoise-shell comb was similar to one missing from the battered head of a woman whose dead body was found in a residential district; the green ribbon had come from another battered head. A close examination of my uncle's assignments and beats completed the damning evidence by showing that in almost every case he had been patroling or stationed near the scene of the murder.

For many reasons this horrible discovery was not made public in its entirety. There had been at least eight murders, all told. They had begun while my uncle was still on the force, and continued after his retirement.

But apparently he had always worn his uniform to lull his victim's suspicions. The collection of newspaper clippings was attributed to his vanity. The incriminating objects he had kept by him were explained as "symbols" of his crimes—ghastly mementoes. "Fetiches" one man called them.

THERE is no need to describe the degree to which my nerves were shaken by this confirmation of my dreams and my fearful sleep-walking experience. Most of all I was terrified by the notion that some murderous taint in the blood of our family had been communicated to me as well as my uncle. I was only slightly relieved when the passing weeks brought no further horrors.

A considerable time afterwards I related the whole matter, in strict, confidence, to a doctor whom I trust. He did not question my sanity, as I feared he might. He took my story at face value. But he attributed it to the workings of my unconscious mind. He said that, during my perusal of the clippings, my unconscious mind had realized that my uncle was a murderer, but that my conscious mind had refused to accept the idea. This resulted in a kind of mental turmoil, magnified by my distraught and highly suggestible state. The "Will to murder" in my own mind was wakened without my knowing it. The slip of paper with the address written on it somehow focussed that force. In my sleep I had got up, dressed myself in my uncle's uniform and walked to the address. While I was sleep-walking my mind imagined it was on all sorts of wild journeys through space and into the past.

The doctor has told me of some very remarkable actions performed by other sleep-walkers. And, as he says, I have no way of proving my uncle was really planning to commit that last murder.

I hope his explanation is correct.

Asthma Mucus Loosened First Day for Thousands

Do recurring attacks of Bronchial Asthma make you choke, strangle and gasp for breath? Are you bothered so bad some nights that you can't sleep? Do you cough and cough trying to raise thick strangling mucus, and strain so hard you fear rupture? Are some attacks so bad you feel weak, unable to work? Are you afraid of colds, exposure and certain foods?

No matter how long you have suffered or what you have tried, we believe there is good news and palliative hope for you in a splendid medicine which was originally a doctor's prescription but that is now available to sufferers at all drug stores under the name of Mendaco.

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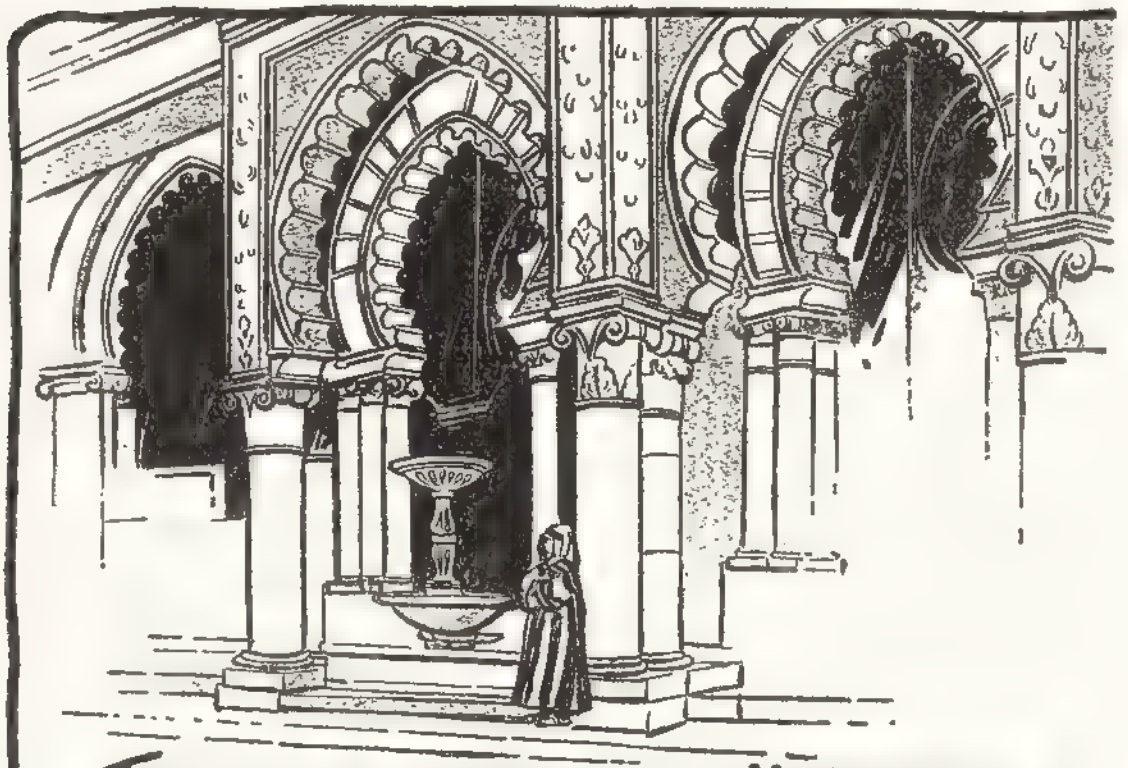
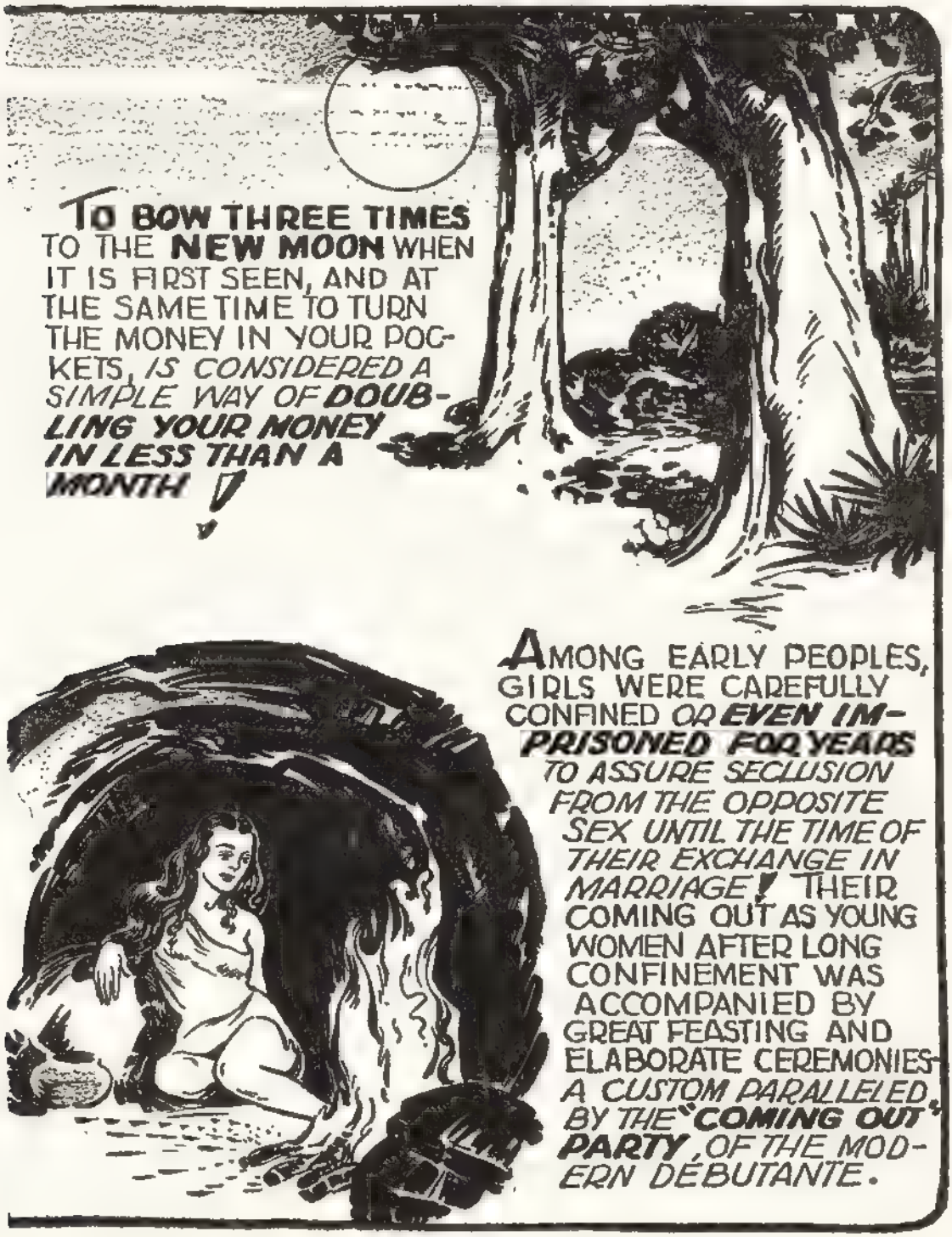
SUPERSTITIONS



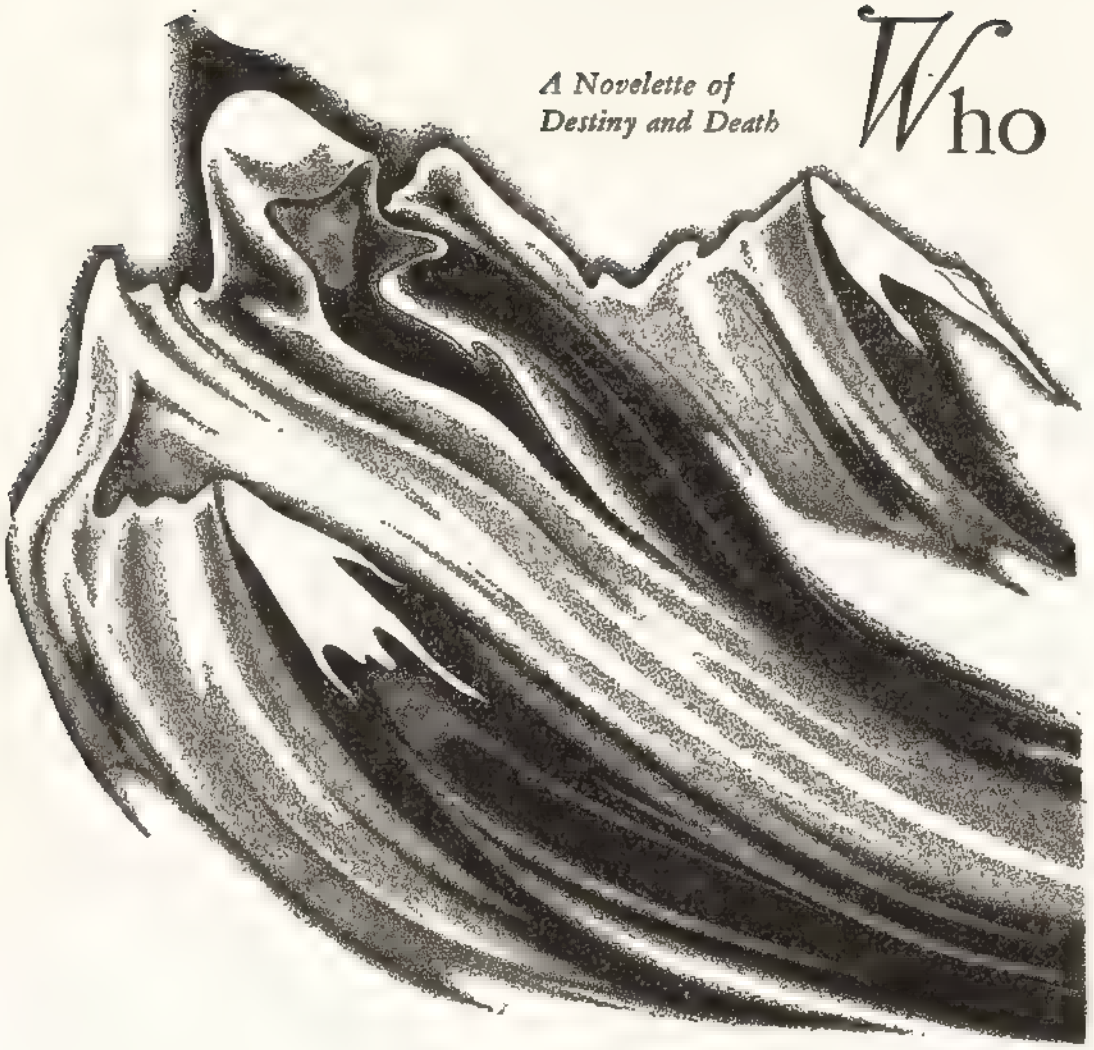
THE ORIGIN OF THE BELIEF IN THE **HORSESHOE** AS AN EMBLEM OF **GOOD LUCK** CAN BE TRACED TO THE ANCIENT DAYS OF PHALLIC WORSHIP. THE PECULIAR SHAPE OF THE HORSESHOE BECAME THE EMBLEM OF ***SEX*** *AND* ***PRODUCTIVITY.*** THE MOORS BELIEVED IN THE HORSESHOE TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT THEIR ARCHITECTURE REFLECTS IT. THEY BELIEVED THAT THE ARCH FORMATION, FOLLOWING THE FORM OF A SHOE, IN THEIR MOSQUES AND TEMPLES WOULD *INSURE STABILITY.* THE WISHBONE OF A CHICKEN ALSO IS CONSIDERED LUCKY BECAUSE OF ITS RESEMBLANCE IN SHAPE TO HORSESHOES. IN SOME COUNTRIES *THE BLACKSMITH WAS CREDITED WITH SUPERNATURAL POWERS, AS IN RUSSIA, WHERE THEY ONCE ENJOYED REPUTATIONS AS MAGICIANS,* ***AND OATHS WERE TAKEN UPON THE ANVIL INSTEAD OF THE BIBLE***

AND TABOOS by Ill=ill


TO BOW THREE TIMES TO THE NEW MOON WHEN IT IS FIRST SEEN, AND AT THE SAME TIME TO TURN THE MONEY IN YOUR POCKETS, IS CONSIDERED A SIMPLE WAY OF DOUBLING YOUR MONEY IN LESS THAN A MONTH!
AMONG EARLY PEOPLES, GIRLS WERE CAREFULLY CONFINED OR EVEN IMPRISONED FOR YEARS TO ASSURE SECLUSION FROM THE OPPOSITE SEX UNTIL THE TIME OF THEIR EXCHANGE IN MARRIAGE! THEIR COMING OUT AS YOUNG WOMEN AFTER LONG CONFINEMENT WAS ACCOMPANIED BY GREAT FEASTING AND ELABORATE CEREMONIES—A CUSTOM PARALLELED BY THE "COMING OUT" PARTY, OF THE MODERN DEBUTANTE.

A Novelette of Destiny and Death

Who



BY SEABURY QUINN

You can fairly feel *the slow unfolding of this tragedy—the relentless closing in of Nemesis—the final springing of the trap!*

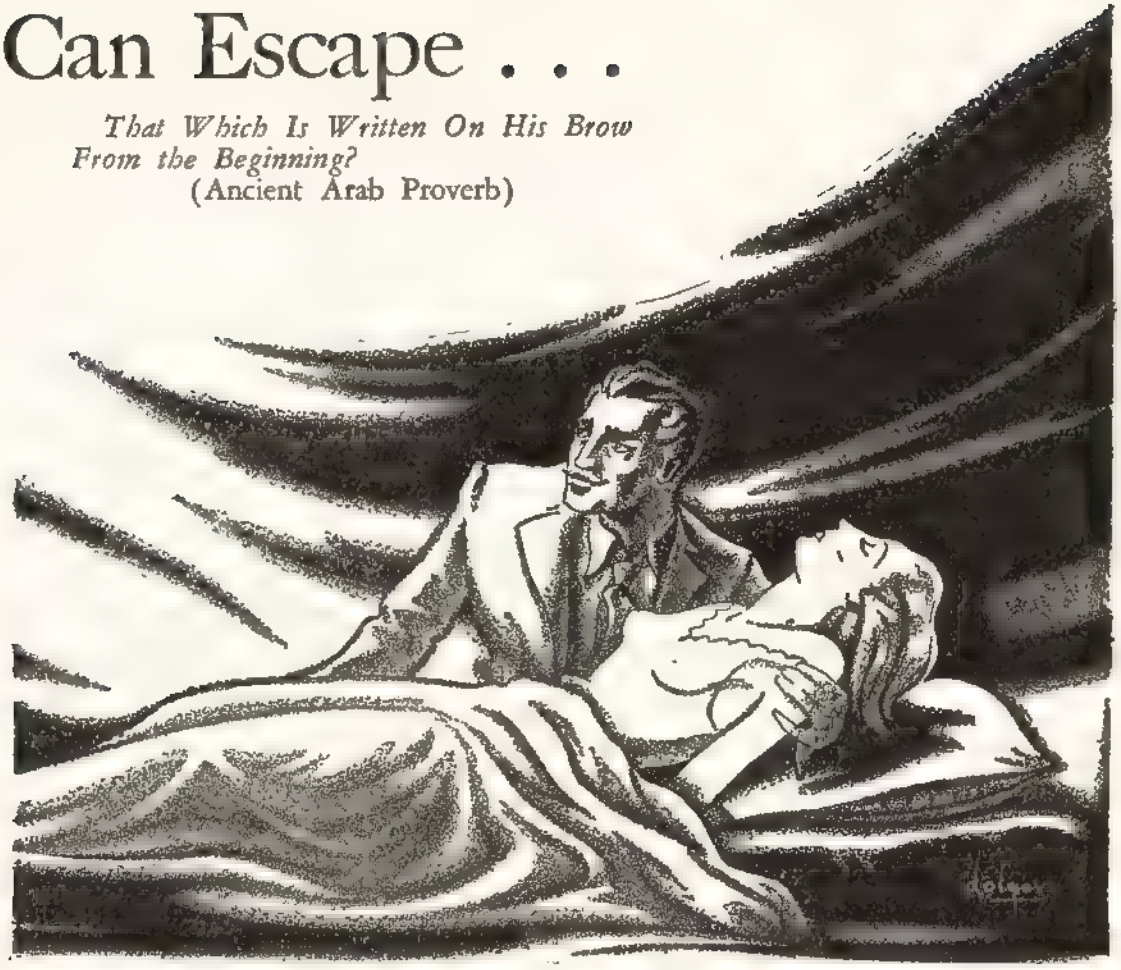
Certificate of Suicide Issued

CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER CHARLES G. RODRIGUEZ today issued a certificate of suicide in the case of Judson Talley, 51, who was found dead in his Sutton Place apartment last Thursday, shot through the right temple and with a .25-caliber automatic pistol lying on the floor beside him.

Mr. Talley, widely known for his activities in the sporting world, especially in racing, was found lying face downward on the floor of his living room by Mahdi Omar, his Syrian houseman, when the latter reported for work early Thursday morning. Although apartments above and below Mr. Talley's were occupied, none of his neighbors recalls hearing the shot which must have ended his life, but as the lethal weapon was of small bore it is believed that traffic noises from the street may have drowned out its report, or the detonation might have been mistaken for a motor car's backfire. Police and the medical examiner's office attribute Mr. Talley's suicide to grief

Can Escape . . .

That Which Is Written On His Brow From the Beginning?
(Ancient Arab Proverb)



over the death of his wife, Mrs. Lavinia Talley, which occurred in Mt. Alto hospital, Fifth Avenue, shortly before midnight Wednesday. She was his second wife, and hospital attendants recall that his first wife, Mrs. Augusta Hall Talley, died at that institution a year ago under strangely similar circumstances, both women having been operated on for appendicitis and both apparently having been well on the way to recovery when fatal relapses occurred.

Mr. Talley had no known relatives in New York and funeral arrangements are being held up pending efforts by the police and public administrator's office to find kin elsewhere. —*New York Daily Sphere.*

Thickly banked snow clouds pushed and crowded on each other, as if they cowered from the sharp lash of the shrewish January wind, but the snow itself had stopped and the dregs of the storm were slush in the streets as Talley came out of the hospital. The nurse's stereotyped condolences still echoed in his ears, the light from the glass doors flowed past him from the vestibule, striking back small echoes of itself in the sad muddy puddles by the curb, slush spattered from the grinding wheels of the taxi he had automatically raised his hand to halt, splashing a pine-tree pattern on his overcoat. He took no notice as he climbed into the cavern-like interior of the cab.

"Where to?" the driver asked as he slammed the door shut; then, as Talley

made no answer: "Where to, sir?" he repeated.

He'd had the stand by the hospital three months now, and learned that fares that came out of the rambling red-brick building were a funny lot of birds. Young fathers, bubbling to the point of effervescence with the pride of recent parenthood, grinning till it seemed their mouths could stretch no farther, slapping him on the back and forcing cigars on him, older men with weary eyes and sagging mouths, tired from their long vigils at the bedsides of their wives or children; sometimes a woman sobbing softly, with the lipstick on her mouth in sharp contrast to the fresh pallor grief had painted on her cheeks. This guy was hard to classify, though. Taut as a fiddle-string, drawn to the point of snapping, yet oddly lax and flaccid-looking—as if he'd been keyed up until his nerves were at the snapping-point, then sought release in liquor which had not yet had time to act. "Where to?" he repeated for the third time, then: "What's that?"

"*Bism-'illah irrahman errahmin!*" his fare had muttered.

"Cut out th' double talk. Where d'ye wanna go?" the cabman snapped.

"Oh? I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking," the passenger apologized. "Six eighty-seven Sutton Place, please."

As they swung east from the Avenue the cabby took a quick look at his fare in the rear-view mirror. Funny-lookin' bird; kind o' gave a guy the creeps. Thin-faced, with a little, almost white mustache and two long lines like saber-scars seared down his cheeks. His hair was gray as lead, and seemed somehow to match the grayness of his face. The black Homburg hat and white-silk scarf tied in an Ascot knot, and the heavy dark-gray melton overcoat were as conservatively fashionable as the address he gave. He ought to be good for a real tip, but. . . . There was something in his eyes that made the cabby feel uncomfortable. Where had he seen such eyes? He ransacked memory as the cab sped down the cross street and skidded to a stop as a red light gleamed suddenly at Madison. He had the answer: Dr. Meise! He'd been loitering in the concourse of Grand Central Terminal one morning when they brought a gang of convicts through for Ossining. One of them was the little Maspeth druggist convicted of poisoning his wife. Meise had just such eyes as these: vacant, blind as marbles inlaid in his face, and sick with desperate fear—no, not exactly fear, but rather the ghost of dead hope. Tip or no tip, he would be glad when he had slammed the door behind this bozo.

TALLEY pressed the wall switch and a mellow light bloomed in the little parchment-shaded lamps each side of the sofa drawn up to the fireplace. The big room seemed strangely familiar. Somehow, he had thought to find it changed, altered past his recognition, since Lavinia was gone. It ought to be, he thought with petulant resentment. It should be desolate and ruinous as a haunted house. For it was haunted. Love haunted. Haunted by the specter of dead happiness. It was matched and blended to her personality as was the blended perfume she affected and the gown that Madame Iukle made for her, yet here it was, unaltered and unchanged, while Vinnie was—his thoughts halted abruptly, blocked by the memory of the empty, staring eyes, the opened flaccid mouth with lolling, idiotic tongue—as if she had made a silly face at him!—and the slack laxness of her drooping jaw. God, how death could make a mocking parody of beauty! He'd never realized before how much the dignity of death owed the embalmer's art.

There was his white-leather wing chair, and there, across the hearth from it, was hers, upholstered in bright green and gold

brocade. For the tenth time he tried to find tears, and couldn't. His eyes ached for the relief tears would bring, but, oddly, he seemed to have none to shed. His hands felt cold against his cheeks and in the hollows of his shoulders fine pain seemed to stab until he thought he'd scream with the torment of it. His throat ached, too, and deep inside his chest he felt a numbing, dull misery, but no tears came to wash the bitter, gritty rasping from his throbbing eyelids. "Lavinia!" he murmured desolately as he looked about the softly lighted room. He could see her now—not as he'd seen her half an hour ago when the nurse drew up the sheet to veil her hideously altered face, but as she'd looked that evening, a little luscious wisp of womanhood clad in a misty negligée of Nile-green chiffon that set off the vivid freshness of her pink-and-white face and the soft luster of her glowing yellow hair and made her look like a bright blossom blooming on a stalk of palest green.

How happy he had been with her there just across the hearth from him! Happy? Delirious was a better word for it. "Give me a cigarette, darling," she had asked as she curled her graceful legs under her and raised her tapering arms in a luxurious stretch, sighed with content, and relaxed again, "and light it for me, please."

He jumped to do her bidding. He always leaped to serve her. She was so beautiful, so fragile, so helpless and exquisite, this morsel of femininity whom he worshiped and adored from the topmost of her childishly-tight blond curls to the rose-enameled nails of her childishly-small toes. "Now put my shoe on for me," she commanded with a pretty pout as he bent and clicked his lighter for her. She extended a tiny coral-tipped white foot to him.

He went down to his knees and retrieved the small gold-kid strapped sandal which had fallen from her foot as she had drawn it up beneath her. It was size two, quadruple A—he had her shoes made specially for her—worked with her monogram in seed pearls where the straps crossed on the instep, and as he set it in place he bent quickly and pressed a kiss on the blue-veined, slim arch of the soft, dimpled foot.

"Old thweetums!" she lisped the baby-talk of endearment as she might have spoken to a pet dog. Her eyes were soft and bright in the firelight as she smiled down at him. "He loves his little Vinnie, doesn't he?"

They made an interesting if not entirely pleasing tableau, the fragile Dresden-china figurine of a woman with her wisp of Nile-green negligée shadowing but not concealing the sweet rondures of her body as she curled up like a kitten in the big chair, and the slim distinguished-looking man of middle age who all but groveled on the hearth rug before her. She regarded him with genuine affection in her violet eyes, but there was something like a look of condescension in her soft glance, too. As if she owned him, body, soul and spirit, and knew the power of her ownership.

On his face was a look of breathless worship such as some ancient priest of Isis might have worn as he knelt all but swooning with the ecstasy of adoration in the temple-place of his goddess.

"Love you?" he echoed hoarsely. Emotion made his voice go hollow. "If you only knew—"

She didn't, of course, but he did; and sometimes the memory of it haunted him like a frail ghost that lacks the strength to make itself more than a vague discomfort to the haunted one; but each time memory troubled him he'd fix his thought on Vinnie, and the little, frail, pale ghost of conscience would go wailing impotently back to its tomb.

JUDSON TALLEY had been brought up to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Especially the pursuit of happiness.

His father was a prosperous butcher in the Bronx, not yet a part of New York City, and because he'd had to slave for everything he had and forego schooling in an orphan's effort to clutch soul and body together he vowed his son should have all that he'd missed. So Judson went to the best schools and had more spending money than the sons of millionaires who were his classmates, and afterwards he went to college with two hundred dollars to squander as he pleased every month. He learned quickly, but because his father took inordinate pride in his scholastic triumphs and social gains the education he acquired was almost useless. At twenty-six he was a Ph.D. and knew an almost numberless amount of things that were information, and very few things that were things. Slender, well-made, dark-haired, gray-eyed, he was an attractive young man, socially eligible and financially desirable—and practically worthless from the standpoint of business, commerce or the professions. When his father hinted diffidently that it might be well for him to think of taking over the responsibilities of the rapidly expanding business, young Judson always had an excellent excuse. He had his social obligations to fulfill, or his duties with the Guard.

The Guard was both his hobby and his passion. He loved the dignity of military discipline, the trim, precise formality of drill. Also he looked extremely well in uniform and the contacts that he made with brother officers helped him socially; helped him to forget his father was a Bronx butcher who had never gone past the third grade in school.

Then came the war, and France, and a measure of the military glory he had dreamed of while in camp for annual maneuvers. His father came to see him off at Hoboken—an alderman's influence had secured a pier pass for him—and to his great embarrassment kissed him on both cheeks before he went up the gangway.

They assigned him to staff work in Paris, so while his former comrades slogged through mud and fought off cooties and grinned back at death a hundred times a day he slept between clean sheets, washed regularly and went to his desk each morning in a spotless, freshly pressed uniform.

Expansion came at home. The chain of prosperous meat markets his father owned grew to a giant enterprise with half-a-dozen slaughter houses of its own. The price of meat soared higher, but demand was always greater than supply. Mr. Talley borrowed from complacent bankers, put up more abattoirs, worked them to capacity, then borrowed more and built more.

Peace broke the bubble. War contracts were canceled, the soldiers were discharged, the swift recession of the early 1920's set in and the giant Talley Packing Company, over-financed and geared to run at profit-making speed only when at maximum production, fell like an unbalanced stock of plates and smashed into a ruin of irredeemable fragments. Nor was it all that broke. A microscopic arteriole in Mr. Talley's brain gave way beneath the pressure of his shattered fortune like an over-inflated baloon tire on a hot pavement, and one gray December morning they found him face-down on his bedroom floor, quits at last with life—and poorer than he had been forty years before when he had opened his first meat stall in Tremont.

When Captain Judson Talley walked down the gangplank of the *Leviathan* after nearly three years service with the Paris Secretariat he found himself at a loose end. There was no work for him, and he was fitted for no special job, even if there had been. The brief halloa of triumph was long since over, returned soldiers were being quoted at a dime a dozen, and prospective employers were demanding evidence of value before they made room on their payrolls for a new man.

He borrowed where he could, bought an outfit of civilian clothes and went looking for a job with easy hours, negligible duties and substantial pay. Meantime he eked out his fast-melting capital by accepting all such invitations as came his way.

AUGUSTA HALL was no beauty. She could not have been called a true brunette, although she certainly was not a blonde. Mousy was perhaps the best description of her coloring, and she did nothing to relieve the drabness of its monotone. Everything about her, her small shoulders, her small, indeterminately-colored eyes, her narrow profile and her thin, long fingers revealed her as a woman of edges rather than curves.

Also, just as some favored women can wear bargain-basement dresses in a way to make them look like Paris importations, Augusta had the unhappy knack of wearing expensive clothes in a way to make them look as if they had been grabbed up at a third-rate rummage sale. At forty she looked forty-five, typically an old maid, one of those unhappy females foredoomed by fate to go to other women's weddings and exclaim over other women's babies.

But though she had no sense of style and no more beauty than a rag doll, she had two qualities to recommend her. She was a lady, no doubt of that. In the gracious poise of her manner, in the softly modulated voice, in everything she did gentility was manifest. And she had money. Lots of it. Her forbears settled on the western tip of Long Island long before Broekly became Brooklyn or anybody visioned bridges over the East River. They set up mills and bought wharf-rights and leased out tracts of land on unredeemable ground rents. Before the Revolution they were well-to-do; when Lee surrendered they were wealthy; the closing of the World War found them rich and few in numbers, with Augusta owner of a large share of their wealth and heir to more of it.

Judson hated the idea, but he had to eat, and all his training had accustomed him to eating only finest, most expensive foods. So he and Augusta were married in Old Plymouth Church, and it was not long before he learned that marrying money is the hardest way to work for it.

Augusta had a house, a big ramshackle mansion dating back to Civil War days, in Pineapple Street. This loathsome pile was furnished in black walnut and horsehair, with gilt-framed portraits of her ancestors upon the walls. And there she made him live, enduring a decrepit heating system, foregoing his daily shower because there was no modern plumbing in the place, enduring cold, dank atmosphere in winter and almost stifling heat in summer.

He had thought that once the marriage ceremony was performed he could embark again upon the life he knew and loved. Instead, he found that he was linked for life to a narrow, strong-willed woman who disapproved of almost everything he liked and held the purse-strings with uncompromising tightness. She did not insist that he go to work—thank God for that! —but she'd scarcely let him from her sight, and when on rare occasions he was able to get out with his old friends he paid for his release with weeks of sitting in the stuffy Brooklyn parlor, entertaining guests who bored him nearly to extinction, or attending lectures and concerts at the Academy. He found the concerts worse than the lectures. He couldn't sleep through them.

For twenty years he trod the dreary treadmill of his servitude. He was housed and clothed and fed, but for this bare existence he paid daily agony of spirit. At fifty he looked his full age and more, a slim man whose face showed utter weariness of life, eyes with a dull, strange, far-off look, almost filmy with ennui, shoulders sloping as though nothing mattered,

hair almost completely gray and a small, trim mustache nearly pure white.

Then, like a vision out of Paradise, he saw Lavinia. He'd begged an evening off to go to a reunion of the Old Regiment, and afterwards some of the boys had taken him to Club 19. They'd had a round of Scotch and soda and were waiting for a refill when he saw her coming toward him with her tray of cigarettes and cigars held before her. Her black-sateen uniform was much like that of Gunga Din, having

" . . . nothin' much before,
An' rather less than 'arf o' that be'ind."

and without a doubt she was the loveliest thing his eyes had ever rested on. Small, almost tiny, not childish in her smallness, but a perfect woman in miniature. Her pale-gold hair, worn short and absolutely frothing with tight little curls, was her outstanding attraction, but her luscious cream-and-strawberry complexion, her violet eyes, her small straight nose and the mouth that seemed a little sad, a little mocking, made up an ensemble that fairly took his breath away. One look at her and all the long repression of his heart-starved life exploded with the violence of a chemical reaction. It had come late—too late! —but there it was: love at first sight, instinctive and spontaneous, so over-powering that it seemed to stop his pulses and his breathing.

"Cigarettes, sir?" she had asked as she paused at his table, her voice throaty, almost caressing. He fumbled with the change as if his fingers had been numbed with cold, finally left it all in the small saucer wedged between the packs of cigarettes and cigar boxes on her tray.

"Whazza matter, feller, got hit bad?" hiccoughed Albert Templeton as he saw the look that Talley cast after the girl. "Little Vinnie get your goat? Wanna meet 'er?"

He slapped a jovial hand on Judson's shoulder and waved the other to her. "Come 'ere, Vinnie," he ordered. "Mr.—I mean Captain—Talley wants a knock-down to you. Be careful of him, gal. He's an old soldier, just like me, an' dangerous, Vinnie—but dangerous!" He hissed the warning through clenched teeth as she came slowly back to the table and gave Talley a brief nod.

"How d'ye do—" she began, then stopped short, a little breathless catch in her voice. She had looked into his eyes, and what she saw there frightened her, yet at the same time struck an echo somewhere deep inside her. She had worked at Club 19 a year and seen desire in men's eyes a thousand time, but this was different. This was worship, adoration, pure idolatry, and it sent a tingle through her like the afterglow of fine old sherry. No woman ever felt the power of her beauty save with exultation, and little Vinnie Dunn the cigarette girl thrilled with jubilation as she saw this mature man—this gentleman—prostrate before the altar of her loveliness.

She laid a tiny hand in his and felt his fingers tremble at her touch. There was nothing wanton in her glance, her look was not voluptuous, yet at the contact with her perfumed palm and at the slow-kindling light in her wide, knowing eyes, he felt himself go weak and helpless with a sort of numbness close akin to pain—the sort of feeling he had not experienced since as a lad in first long trousers he had called on his first sweetheart.

HE SAW her every chance he had, which was not often. Money was hard to obtain, for Augusta demanded full particulars before she wrote a check. Opportunity was even harder. He had to have an excellent excuse to be away from home at dinner, and excuses were difficult to invent with Augusta's calm, slightly ironical eyes fixed on him.

He pawned the wrist-watch she had

given him and put the proceeds on a bet he made through a poolroom. He picked a daily double at Bay Meadows that paid off fifty-five to two, and for a time was flush.

After that he followed race meets clear across the country, Jamaica, Pimlico, Churchill Downs, Santa Anita—he placed bets at all of them. Sometimes he lost, but oftener he won, so lack of money ceased to worry him, but opportunity to see Lavinia was rarer than star rubies, and he hoarded every moment spent with her in memory as a miser hoards his treasure.

Once or twice they motored to the shore for glorious release upon the sands. In sharkskin shirt and slacks she was adorable, slim, straight and supple as a lad, yet with no hint of masculinity about her. In a black lastex swim-suit with the sunlight foaming in her golden, tight-curled hair, she was a vision to make his heart skip a beat, then race until it almost stopped his breath. Her body was as perfect as an alabaster statuette hewn by some master-craftsman of old Greece, and added to her gorgeous coloring it was a sight to set an artist reaching for his pigments and brushes, but most of all he loved her little feet. Shod stylishly in leather, kid or satin their tininess and shapeliness caused heads to turn and necks to crane as she clicked past on high slim heels—but they could drive a man insane when they were naked.

Conceivably he might have had an *affaire* with her. He never knew if that were possible or not. Men do not set up idols in the secret temples of their souls and bow down to them and worship them only to defile them.

AT LAST she let him kiss her. They had been for one of their brief outings to Westchester in a hired car and it was late when he drew up before her house. Their relations had been friendly, nothing more, for he dared not trust himself to touch her, and while his soul looked from his eyes each time he glanced at her he said no word and made no move to bring them into greater intimacy. The moon was full that night, its light was silver on the dew-drenched grass of the small park across from her apartment. The city had grown quiet, but small noises came to them—the muted belling of a ferry-whistle, the subdued murmur of an elevated train as it snaked up Third Avenue, and from downtown the heavy, mellow gonging of the great clock in the Metropolitan Tower. She leaned back on the cushions of the car and sighed with weariness and content. "How beautiful the night is."

His pulses hurried to a quicker rhythm. He had a frantic, almost smothered feeling in his breast beside his heart. He could scarcely force the words out, but he did—"How utterly and perfectly beautiful you are!"

Her blue eyes met his, flickering for a second, then, "Oh, you are sweet!" she whispered and turned her face up for his kiss like an affectionate child.

Quicker than thought the longing in him raced to meet the challenge of her lightly parted lips. The flame of her raced in his blood and crashed against his brain. He drew her to him hungrily, and she clung to him with a sudden, unexpected vehemence. He could feel the quickening flutter of her heart beats through the light silk of her dress, her hair was fragrant on his cheek, her mouth was soft as rose leaves on his mouth. She was a woman, sweet and young—adorable—and he, for all his age, a man.

He was married. Yes. He was dependent on his wife for everything he had, for food and clothes and shelter. Yes, he knew that, too; but here against his heart was trembling the first woman he had ever really loved. His barren, cheated, empty life cried out for her. His heart, his very blood, were leagued against his reason.

But reason reasserted itself in the morning. How could he ask this gorgeous girl to share a life of poverty with him? Indeed, how could he ask her to share life with him at all? He was old enough to be her father. If he could give her every luxury, indulge her every whim and invent fresh ones to indulge, he might beseech her to accept him as her slave, but as things were—

He stayed away from Club 19 for almost six months, then, the craving for a sight of her grown stronger than the longing of a dope fiend for his drug, went back.

She saw him as he entered and came toward him, both hands lifted, and both his hands reached out for hers. "You've been away?" she asked, and he saw tears start to her lovely eyes and noticed that her lower lips was trembling.

"I've been through hell," he answered almost harshly, and her eyes went wider with surprise and alarm.

"Hell?" she repeated questioningly.

"Yes, my dear, hell. Anywhere away from you is hell to me."

"Oh," her voice tremulous, as if emotion strove to break through it, "you are so sweet—" she stopped and drew her breath in quickly with a sort of half-elated, half-affrighted gasp before concluding in a whisper—"darling!"

AUGUSTA called him to her room as he crept past her door, and one look at her face brought paralyzing fright to him. She was too much the gentlewoman to create a scene, she did not raise her voice, but her words were heavy with contempt and biting as the cut of an oiled whiplash.

"I've fed and clothed and sheltered you for twenty years," she told him bitterly. "I rescued you from poverty and gave you everything a decent man could ask. The least you could have given in return was faithfulness. Even if you didn't love me—and, of course, you never did—you might have paid me back with loyalty and decency, not made a scandal with your carryings-on with a low night-club entertainer."

He tried to break in, tried to say a word in defense of Lavinia, but before the icy hatred in the woman's eyes his tongue was paralyzed. "I shan't divorce you," she announced. "You'd like that, wouldn't you—like your freedom, so that you could spend your whole time with that painted hussy?

"No fear! You married me, and you'll stay married to me, but from now on you'll work for your board and lodging. I'll see my Cousin Elwood in the morning and have him make a place for you in his office where he can watch what you are doing. You're in my debt for more than you can ever pay, but every week I'll take your salary and apply it on account. You may eat and sleep and stay here—during good behavior—but if I hear another breath of scandal about you—"

She broke off sharply, and the silence fairly thundered after her denunciation. Finally: "Why don't you say something?" she demanded.

"What's there to say? It seems you've had me spied on—"

"Spied on!" Her laugh was bitter as a curse. "As if you needed watching! Your mad infatuation with this creature is town gossip. Half a dozen of my friends' husbands have told them about it, and they, of course, came straight to me. As if it weren't enough to have you mooning round a girl who's young enough to be your daughter, you subject me to the pity of my friends!"

Her voice was so flat and unaccented that it seemed mechanical as she finished, "I thought you loved me, needed me; that you cared for something but my money, and so I made you heir to all I have, for I knew you'd never be able to live without

my support. But I'll change all that in the morning. I'll see Alvin Johnson the first thing and have him draw a new will—"

Cold anger stopped her speech. She was suffering the deepest hurt a woman could endure, but bearing it with the courage of a thoroughbred. "Get out!" She waved her hand contemptuously, as if she were dismissing a servant caught stealing.

It was nearly daylight when he heard her call out in agony. It took possibly a minute for her hail of distress to penetrate his sleep, and when he woke he thought he had been dreaming till it came again, weaker now, and broken by short groans of pain.

Her cries were muted to low, panting moans when he reached her. Small drops of perspiration stood out on her brow and upper lip and she held her hands clasped to her stomach, as if trying to force back the press of unendurable distress. "What is it?" he asked fatuously, blinking rapidly to clear sleep from his eyes.

"I—don't—know," she gasped between moans, "but it's dreadful. Call Dr. Elkins, please."

"H'm. Appendicitis, pretty well advanced," Dr. Elkins diagnosed. "I'll ring for an ambulance. We'll have to operate right away."

HER face was livid, almost green with post-operative pallor, her lips were nearly gray as lead, and round her eyes the little network of fine wrinkles seemed to have been etched more deeply by her suffering.

The cords of her neck stood out in long lines that reached from her chin to the high neck of the coarse hospital bedgown, making her throat look scrawny as that of a plucked chicken. She greeted him with fluttering eyelids, nothing more, then watched him almost warily as he sat down beside her.

"How's it go, dear?" he asked as he reached for her hand. It was not a gesture of affection. She'd been having a foul time of it, and he'd have bestowed a pat of comfort on a suffering dog in similar circumstances.

She moved her hand weakly, avoiding contact with his, but the by-play was lost upon the nurse. "I'll be right outside in the corridor, Mr. Talley," she beamed with professional cheerfulness as she tiptoed toward the door. There were no complications, and Mrs. Talley had come out of anesthesia nicely. Besides, they'd want a little privacy—

"How are you?" he asked as the door closed softly on the nurse. "Not suffering too much, I hope?" She turned a haggard face toward him with an effort. Her strength was nearly spent, but the spirit looking from her sunken eyes was indomitable. There was no compromise in her look, no weakening, no forgiveness. As she flicked her tongue across her lips he noticed it seemed dry, almost rasping.

"Thirsty," she besought.

"Oh, no," he shook his head. "You mustn't; it would—"

He broke his denial half uttered. "Of course, dear, just a moment," he finished and tiptoed to the bureau where a tall pitcher filled with ice water stood beside two tumblers on a tray. "Here'" he dropped a bent-glass drinking tube into the brimming goblet and held it till her lips closed on it, then, as she sucked the chilling liquid avidly: "Another?"

She drank the second glassful and he went quickly to the bathroom, drew water from the faucet till the pitcher showed no sign of having been used, then drew his handkerchief and wiped the drinking tube and tumbler carefully. No telltale moisture, no betraying fingerprints.

His eyes were shining with elation and he had to hold himself in check to keep from laughing as he dropped once more into his chair beside the bed. This had

been too utterly, absurdly, easy. Fate had dropped the marked cards in his lap. Ether anesthesia—ice water—make another will, would she? Set him slaving in her cousin's office and collect his wages every week? They'd see about that. It ought not to be long, now.

Nor was it. Shocked by the chill of almost a pint of ice water her stomach and intestinal tract rebelled. A spasm rippled through her face, then a sudden shudder shook her arms, her shoulders, her whole body. Contorting with the force of it she turned her face to him and looked full in his jubilant, elated visage.

Realization came to her too late. The eyes were sick and desperate in her pale, drawn face. She tried to reach the call-bell, but had not the strength, tried to raise her voice, but could force nothing but a raspy, sighing groan between her lips. Then for a moment her eyes locked with his. There was no fright, not even hatred, in her glance. Rather, it was the sort of look she might have cast into a pit of snakes at the zoo's reptile house. Not anger, but disdainful contempt; not fear, but loathing looked from her drawn, masklike face.

Then the full force of convulsion struck her, and after he had waited till there seemed no fear of consciousness returning, Judson Talley pressed the button of the nurse's call-bell.

It was one of those unfortunate cases which medicine cannot explain and so does not attempt an explanation. Mrs. Talley had shown every sign of quick and normal recovery. It had been a simple appendectomy; no complications. The operation had been quite successful. But the patient died.

The broken sod had not had time to heal above Augusta's grave when Judson and Lavinia were married. That she consented to become his wife astonished him, and that she did not tire of him or show resentment at the years that lay between them left him breathlessly bewildered. Infatuated, as only an aging man could be with a young and lovely woman, he looked on her acceptance of his utter—often servile—devotion as a species of self-sacrifice. It seemed wonderful and kind in her to let him buy her clothes and furs and jewelry at the most expensive shops. When she thanked him with a smile and kiss for a small flask of perfume that had cost almost five hundred dollars he was almost awe-struck at her condescention. His passion for the race course had not dulled with affluence, and he gained a widespread reputation no less for the consistency with which he won than for the size of the bets he placed, but the satisfaction he derived from backing long shots against the field and making fools of all the dopesters paled to insignificance beside the unadulterated joy he felt when she permitted him to latch a necklace round her throat or put her shoes on.

For her part she was reasonably happy and content. All her life she had known poverty, and her work at Club 19 had made her more aware of its sharp gripe. Often she had cried herself to sleep when she came home from work at dawn and thought of the fine furs, the splendid gowns and opulent jewelry of the women she had seen the night before, then compared them with her tawdry imitation ermine coat, her bargain basement dresses and her ten-cent store "pearls." Now she had everything she'd ever longed for and many things of whose existence she had never dreamed, and if at times his fawning adulation palled on her, to let him grovel like a bondslave at her feet and do her the most menial services as though they were high privileges seemed small enough return to make for all he gave. And in a little while she rather grew to like the abject servitude he offered. The realization of her power over him was stimulating to her ego. She had worked since little-girlhood at semi-menial occupa-

tions—shop girl, hat check girl, cigarette vendress. Now she was mistress and lady in her own establishment, pampered, petted, idolized. He begged her almost tearfully to let him serve her, to let him wash her stockings, comb her hair, take off her shoes and put them on. Her smallest frown could bring him literally to his knees, a single sharp word made him beg forgiveness for imaginary faults with all the fervor of a captive pleading for his life. She found the new existence very pleasant. The throne of his devotion made a comfortable seat, his heart an ideal footstool.

HE HAD been vaguely troubled all that day. One year ago that night he'd bought release from Augusta and made his marriage with Lavinia possible by administering a drink of ice water. He had no remorse for that, nor any fear of retribution. The dead were dead, the past was past. You could no more recall the one than the other. His whole life since Augusta died had been enough to give the lie to all the stuffy maxims about ill-gotten gains being unprofitable, or conscience flogging those who strayed from the straight, narrow path.

But as he walked across town that morning he'd glimpsed a figure that struck echoes in his memory. It was a woman dressed in rusty black, not poor, but frumpish, as if her dress had been spoiled in the making and ruined past redemption in the wearing. Her hat, too, was a nondescript affair, not wholly unbecoming, but without a trace of style. He thought of Vinnie's modish chapeaux—small, inconsequential trifles weighing possibly three ounces each and costing twice their weight in gold—and smiled whimsically as he compared them with the heavy felt headgear this woman wore. Why, such a hat might have been suited to Augusta—

The thread of his thought snapped as if a knife of fear had severed it, and he took a step back while his lips parted, then shut again abruptly.

The woman had been looking in a shop window at a display of religious books and as he came almost abreast of her she turned her face toward him. There was no doubting it. The long and rather equine face, the prominent, slim chin, the thin-lipped mouth, the small, intelligent dark eyes all belonged to Augusta—Augusta who was dead a year today and almost a year buried in Greenwood.

He drew his breath in so quickly that it seemed like a sob, and stood there staring at her, sick and desperate. A verse from Shelley seemed to come from nowhere and din against his inward ear in rhythm with the blood that throbbed and pounded there:

There are ghosts that may take revenge for it.

The woman looked at him a moment with cool, dispassionate irony in her level gaze, then turned back to the shop window.

"I—I—" he faltered, then stopped, breathless, for the woman had looked at him again, eyebrows slightly raised as he spoke. And she was not Augusta. She bore no semblance to Augusta, save as all thin, dowdy, middle aged women bear some resemblance to each other.

"I beg your pardon," he concluded as she continued to look quizzically at him, then touched his hat and hurried past.

But at Fifty-sixth and Madison, as he waited for a traffic light to change, he caught the level, satirical stare of a pair of small dark eyes as a taxicab went flashing by, and recognized them as Augusta's.

Three or four times he thought he saw her dowdy, ill-dressed figure in the crowds, in passing cars, in the subway, and every time she seemed to look at him with calmly mocking eyes; not hostile, not menacing, but vaguely taunting and triumphant.

His business downtown was finally finished and he hurried home. Home to the security of firelight and drawn curtains, with Lavinia's blond, dainty loveliness as an anodyne for troubled nerves, her soft sweet, scented arms and softer, sweeter lips to drive the memory of Augusta and his life with her back to the limbo of forgotten things.

Mahdi Omar, their Syrian butler and factotum, had served a perfect dinner, with the subdued candlelight falling on cloth and silver and glassware: oysters with sparkling chablis, green turtle soup with Spanish sherry, a rolled roast, crisp and crackling-brown on the outside, pink and succulent within, Maine potatoes steeped and stewed in its juice, with rich full-bodied burgundy; finally an apple tart for him and an orange charlotte russe for her.

Afterwards they sat before the fire of cannel coal in the big living room while she poured coffee from a Georgian Sheffield pot in eggshell porcelain cups and brandy from a cut glass bottle into bubble-thin inhalers, and he sat worshiping her with his eyes. They were not going out, and she had worn a negligée instead of dinner gown, and the gold-kid, pearl-set boudoir sandals he had bought her from the bootmaker's that evening. He could see the gleam of the gay lacquer on her tiny toenails and the ivory-white, pale glowing of her slim, small feet between the braided lacings of the shoes. This was not merely happiness, he thought. It was heaven—

HE HAD lit her cigarette and replaced the tiny sandal she had kicked off capriciously. Now, kneeling on the hearth-rug before her he was looking at her as a hermit might gaze on a vision. "Old thweetums," she had lisped in playful baby-talk, "he loves his little Vinnie, doesn't he?" And:

"Love you?" he had echoed. "If you only knew—"

And then the sudden spasm of shrill pain had raced across her face. Her cheeks went pale with abrupt pallor. The scarlet lipstick on her mouth and the bright rouge on her cheeks stood out sharply as the blood receded from her face; she pressed her little milk-white teeth into her lower lip and laced her little ineffectual rose-tipped hands across her small flat stomach, hugging herself in quick agony.

Raw suffering was stark in her blue eyes. "Oh-oh, Juddie darling, I'm so sick—it hurts so!" she quavered in a little, frightened voice. "I think I'm going to die!"

He could see the tiny beads of perspiration standing like a diadem of little diamonds on her brow beneath the hairline, see the skin of her chin wrinkle suddenly, as if with frostbite, and fear abysmal as the grave struck at his heart as he looked.

"Appendicitis. Pretty well advanced, but nothing to worry about; have to operate at once, though," the doctor said when he'd completed his examination. "I'll call an ambulance."

HE SAT beside her, one of her small flaccid hands in his. She's stood the ordeal well, they told him, probably would not be sick when she came out of the ether. "No complications," Dr. Whitcraft reassured him. "No reason why she shouldn't be out dancing in a couple of weeks. I made a buttonhole incision; there'll be hardly any scar, and a few physiotherapy treatments should erase even that."

"I'll be right outside if you need me, Mr. Talley," the nurse promised. "I don't think she'll wake for several hours, but be sure to call me just as soon as she begins to stir."

A chill of January air came through the partly opened window, and with it came the subdued rumble of the traffic on the Avenue.

She'd need the fresh air, he mustn't close the window, he told himself as he

turned his collar up against the mounting cold.

But it was getting colder every second. It seemed to him the air was fraught with more than natural chill—that it was cold with the utter, stark coldness of interstellar space where spirits of the unquiet dead, the dead who seek revenge for unavenged injuries, float bodiless but vengeful on the vagrant winds of destiny—

This wouldn't do! He pulled himself up sharply. "Nerves!" he muttered. "You've got a case of nerves, feller. You thought you saw Augusta all day long because she died a year ago tonight. Snap out of it, you fathead. The dead are dead. They can't reach through to us. If they could—"

His thought raced off at a tangent. If Augusta only knew! If she could see the way they'd used her money—the money she'd have done him out of if he hadn't given her that drink—to play and frolic with. If she—poor, dowdy frump!—could see the ermine evening wrap and silver fox jaquette and mink dolman he'd bought Vinnie with her money, or that string of matched pearls, the pear-shaped star sapphire ear-studs, or that diamond and ruby marquise dinner ring—she who had never owned a piece of frivolous jewelry in her life, not even an engagement ring, because he couldn't buy her one! If she could see the little pearl-set sandals he'd bought Lavinia that day, or the slim-linked platinum anklet— He gave a low, amused chuckle. It would be worth while to call her back for a moment, if he could, just to show her those things.

It was the dulled echo of an ambulance's siren, of course, but he could have sworn a faint wail whistled down the breeze that seeped into the room. Yet it was not exactly a wail, either; there was a sound of faintly mocking laughter in it; not actually malicious, but not far from it. He shivered, not entirely with the growing cold, and sunk his chin a little deeper in his upturned collar. "Nerves again!"

Irresistible drowsiness crept over him. What time was it? he wondered, then realized that his left hand was clasped in Lavinia's right. He could not withdraw it without disturbing her, so could not see his wrist-watch. No matter. He could stand it a few hours more. It would be worth it to have her see his face first of all when she awakened.

Despite himself he nodded. He wasn't quite unconscious, but he was not quite awake. He couldn't be, for he was dreaming. Dreaming that a shadow crossed the dimly lighted room and paused beside the bureau where the water pitcher stood beside two tumblers on a tray. It didn't seem to have much shape, it was indefinite and unreal, as ghosts are said to be, or like an object seen through fog. Yet it was tangible enough to hide the water pitcher and the glasses from him.

He sat forward in his chair, eyes narrowed. Was he dreaming, or was he really seeing something? Do you know that you are dreaming when you dream, or—

The gurgling gug-gug-gug of liquid being poured came to him faint. Damn those shaded lights! He couldn't see what went on by the bureau. Of course, it was a shadow thrown by the partly opened bathroom door, but— Cautiously, not to disturb Lavinia, he began to draw his hand away. He had to get across the room, to see if there were something—

"Thweetums—Juddie darling!" Vinnie's shrill cry drove the faintest trace of drowsiness from him. Vinnie's little hand clutched at his fingers with a force he had not thought her whole small body held. "Oh, darling, I'm so sick—I'm dying!"

He jumped up, oversetting his chair, switched on the ceiling light and pushed the button of the nurse's call-bell.

Little Vinnie writhed in a convulsion. Her eyes were open—staring but unseeing

—her red mouth closed and opened in sharp spasmotic gasps, her little white teeth bit her lips and tongue until fresh blood ran down her dimpled chin in two small rivulets, one from each corner of her mouth.

The nurse was there. The house physician came a moment later. "What the hell'd you give her water for?" he demanded. "Don't you know a patient who's been etherized—"

"I? Give her water?" Talley echoed incredulously. "Don't be a fool, man! I'd never have done anything like that. I couldn't have. I've been sitting right here by the bed the whole time, holding her hand, and waiting—"

"Yeah?" the doctor interrupted sarcastically. "If you didn't give it to her, who did? Mickleson's been outside in the corridor the whole time, and no one came in through the door." He pointed an accusing finger to the bedside table. On it stood an empty water goblet with a bent-glass drinking tube in it. "I s'pose you'll try to tell me that a little fairy fluttered through the window and gave her that drink while you were sleeping—or maybe it was a ghost? Now get the hell out of here and stay out till I send for you. I'll do the best I can for her, but—"

He leaned against the wall outside the sickroom. The echo of the angry doctor's words kept dinning in his ears; ". . . maybe it was a ghost!" He put his hands up to his eyes to shut the light out, bit his lips to keep from screaming. She was his life, his breath, his soul. All the love that family men had for their children, all the devotion pious people gave to God, he had lavished on that little fragile wisp of womanhood in there. If she should die—die as Augusta died— The words came clumsily and haltingly, for he hadn't prayed in almost forty years, but somehow he found them: ". . . burn me in hell forever, for I'm a murderer, but let my little Vinnie live . . ."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Talley, really sorry," Miss Mickleson the nurse laid a compassionate hand on his shoulder. "I'm afraid she didn't have much chance. She was so frail—"

"You—you mean—" he looked at her with dull, lack-luster eyes.

She nodded sadly. "Yes, Mr. Talley, she's gone." Then, as a ragged, broken sob pushed past his lips: "Don't blame yourself too much, sir. You didn't know what you were doing. You were overwrought and very tired, and probably dropped off to sleep. She must have waked and asked for water—they often do—and you got it for her without knowing—just as if you'd been sleep-walking. I've known such cases."

HE'D picked up several scraps of Arabic from Mahdi Omar. One of them the houseman used when everything was going wrong, and when he'd asked him what it meant he had translated: *"Bism-'illah irrahman errahmin*—who can escape that written on his brow from the beginning?" The memory of it came to him as he walked numbly from the hospital and climbed into the taxicab.

"Who can escape—"

The room seemed unchanged. He looked about it wonderingly. It should be changed. It should be desolate and dust-strewn, like a haunted house. For it was haunted. Love haunted. Haunted by the wraith of his dead happiness.

The softly shaded lamplight picked out dear, familiar objects, the little unconsidered trifles they had bought on their gay shopping expeditions: silver cigarette boxes, the muted blues and reds and bishop's-purple of old Chinese porcelain, cloisonné ashtrays, their made to order match-books, even Vinnie's little gilt-kid sandal that had fallen from her foot when he had lifted her to bear her to the bedroom.

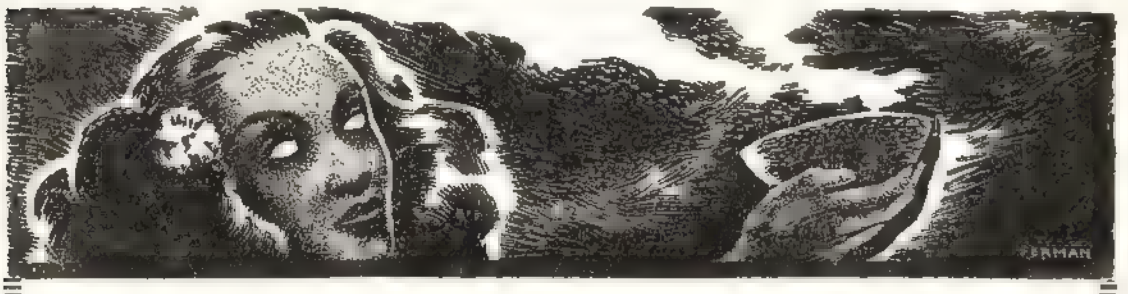
"*Bism-'illah irrahan arrahim*—who can escape his destiny?"

He picked the little slipper up, fondling it as a mother might yearn over her dead baby's shoe. Had he, as Miss Mickleson suggested, given her that fatal drink in a seizure of somnambulism, or had it, as the doctor asked sarcastically, been a ghost? No matter. Little lovely Vinnie was dead. Either he had killed her, or the dour, uncompromising, unforgiving woman who had died a year ago had come back from the misty land where the unquiet dead are and—

"*Bism-'illah irrahman*—who can escape—" He rummaged in the desk drawer, found the little automatic pistol, slipped back its safety catch. He raised the tiny gold-kid sandal to his lips with his left hand, pressed the pistol muzzle to his temple with his right. "*Bism'illah*—can a horse outrun its tail or a man outstrip his shadow?"

The report sounded like a bursting light bulb. He staggered drunkenly a moment, turned halfway round and fell full-length upon his face. The impact of his fall set the fire tongs and shovel tinkling musically in their brass stand.

The little sandal had slipped from his grasp. His hand moved slowly, painfully; crawled toward it till it touched the cross straps where her monogram was worked in seed pearls. And moved no more.



The Curse

By PAGE COOPER

WHEN the moon is dark as a black bat's throat,
The stars are hidden, the night is dim,
The dead air shivers at grunt of stoat
Rootling the leaves where grave stones glim.

Beware of the herbs with their leaves stemmed up
Touch no yarrow and taste no scud
Of foxglove wine from a ghost girl's cup,
Drink no philtre of lapwing's blood.

Make no mock of the black jay's mate
Nor the witless grief of the mourning dove,
Or you'll die of loving what you should hate,
Cursed with hating what you should love.

"His palm was sweaty, gripping the knife he'd picked up out of the sand . . ."

Table for Two

By ARTHUR LEO ZAGAT

Thought you heard something? Don't be silly. It was just the sea you heard—just the foam on the ebb tide . . .

THE table where he sat was at the very edge of the terrace below which the sea foam whispered, and in the farthest corner from the leaf-arched entrance. Most of the couples who came here would accept it only if no other were available, for the music reached here only faintly, the rustling bulk of an oleander bush blocked their view of the dancing, and the waiter's eye was hard to catch.

He smiled, thinking how it was for these very reasons they two had always met here, because in this fragrant shadow they could be alone together—be almost safe from discovery.

So many evenings, this long summer, he had waited here for her as he waited now, that the waiter did not come near him, did not even glance at him. The waiter knew that he would not order until and unless she came, slender and graceful, her face scarf-hidden till she unveiled it for his kiss.

Nights almost beyond counting he had waited here for her, never certain that she had been able to slip away from old Forsythe, who owned her. But tonight was different. Tonight he was certain that she would come. And this was the last night that she would have to come to him furtively, the last night they would have to part secretly, she returning to the great stone house on the hill, he to the lonely shack on the dunes where rusted the typewriter whose clacking had brought her to his open door, that morning so long and long ago.

He had thought her a child when he'd looked up and seen her, sun bright on tumbled, russet hair framing a small face pert-featured yet somehow wistful, laughter in hazel eyes somehow like sun-glint on the surface of deep, dark waters.

He had not thought her a child long.

Yes, tonight was different, a night for farewells. A muted sadness was in it, in the sough of the tide and the wind-rustle of the bushes. Summer's end. The strains of *In the Vienna Woods* seemed to come from a far distance. Forms glimpsed through the oleander's dark foliage were dim. The noises of the place; laughter from the tables, crunch of feet on gravel, shuff, shuff of dancing; seemed strangely hushed.

He pulled the edge of his hand across his forehead. Sound, sight, seemed to be fading as the summer was fading. Time itself seemed to be slipping from him. He could not, for instance, quite recall coming to this table beneath which the sea foam whispered, very near now because it was full tide.

No wonder in that. No one could be quite normal after—after what he had done. He could recall *that* clearly enough. Too clearly. As though it were happening now—

He was creeping, in the early dark, toward the single lighted rectangle that broke the gloom of the great stone house on the hill. His palm was sweaty, gripping the knife he'd kicked up out of the sand. He was afraid, but he was confident too. It all was working out exactly as he had anticipated when she had told him that Forsythe was sending her to the city to prepare for their return, and that she would dine before starting back. That the servants, all but the chauffeur who was to drive her, were to attend a dance in the village.

THEIR butler had argued that Forsythe should not remain alone. Two nights ago someone had been seen prowling about the rear of the house, last night a cottage on the shore road, and so on. But the old man irascibly had insisted on having his own way, as he always did.

Remembering how these matters had made a pattern at the center of which was the salvaged knife, he reached the tall French window that stood open to the lawn and peered around its edge.

Hamlin Forsythe, shrunken and gray-faced and thin-lipped, was sunk deep in an arm chair too big for the dried-up body, so big that its wing hid all but the narrow shoulders, the hairless head— That head lifted, turned, and gray, hard eyes looked straight at him!

A voice like the rustle of dried leaves. "Don't stand out there. Come in."

He obeyed, hiding the knife behind his

back. He halted just inside, barely two feet from the old man.

The latter looked at him with the utterly dispassionate curiosity of a scientist examining an unfamiliar specimen. "So you have come here."

"Yes, he replied, hoarsely, surprised that he could speak at all. "I have come."

"Well," Forsythe sighed. "I am ready for you." The old man's hand came up above the covert of the chair's side and the revolver in it was shining, huge. In the split second before it could fire, his knife flailed for the scrawny throat—

"Darling."

She was slipping into the chair across from him, even that small movement informed with singing grace. "Heart of mine." He had her hands in his, was leaning across the little table to put his lips on hers.

HANDS, lips, were icy. "You are cold, my very dear."

"Yes. I am cold." In the dimness he could not see her as clearly as he would have liked, but he could make out that she wore a hat, that her slenderness was still clad in an afternoon suit. "Desperately cold."

"You are exhausted. You came straight here from that long drive. I'll order a drink to warm you."

"No, lover." A swash of water ran along the terrace wall, the turn of the tide. "I may stay only a moment, to say good-by."

"Not good-by, my dear. Not in a moment nor ever again. Let me tell you—"

"There is something I must tell you," her shadow-voice stopped his. "While I was in the city, I spoke to our family physician— No, not for myself. Hamlin had been in to him for an examination, Wednesday, and I wanted to know why he had not received the report of certain laboratory tests.

"He had. Doctor Carter had written him. He had received the letter yesterday morning, and he had not shown it to me because—because what it told him was that he had perhaps six months more to live."

"Six months," he whispered.

"Not possibly any more. I drove right home, without stopping for dinner and so drove into the grounds just as you were stepping in through that window. I jumped from the car and ran to stop you, voiceless, and I was right behind you when he fired. Hamlin saw me. And that is why we must part, forever."

"Part—" He remembered the shot now—"I am sorry, sir," the headwaiter said, right above her. "But this is the only table I have left." A boy and girl were with him.

"You fool! *Don't you see us?*" Heeding that cry not at all, the man pulled out a chair—

The chair in which she'd been sitting only an instant before.

Sinking into the other chair at the table for two, Bob Cortland looked startled, suddenly. He glanced around, turned back to the girl, his brow corrugated. "Maybe I'm nuts, kid, but I thought I heard someone, right here, whisper, 'Good-by'."

"Silly." Mary Hamlin's laugh was silvery tinkle. "It was just the sea you heard, Bobbie. Just the foam on the ebb tide."

A Letter to the Fans—and to Fan Mags

THE fans—bless 'em—are always with us, and their magazines often offer us ideas that are worth pondering on. But one side of their activities is pondered on by authors of professional standing—we have sometimes been in on these discussions—what to say when editors of fan magazines ask for "just one story to help us along." Seabury Quinn received such a request not long ago, from a fan magazine editor who lamented, "It has been our distasteful experience to be completely ignored both by fan and professional authors." Mr. Quinn didn't ignore the fan magazine editor's letter; he wrote such an interesting reply to it that we are including it in the Eyrie, feeling that it might answer questions by some other fan magazine editors —and be of interest to all of them:

Mr. Blaine R. Dunmire, Editor,
THE GHOUL,
108 Maple Street,
Charleroi, Pennsylvania.

Friend Dunmire:

It's been my longstanding and unvarying rule not to contribute to fan magazines for several reasons:

These publications are quite numerous, and while they vary in quality as widely as do commercial magazines, a writer can't consistently separate the sheep from the goats. He can't say, "I write for A because it's better than B." The logical answer to that might be, "If you'd give your work to B it would soon be as good or better than A. Why don't you give it a break?"

Then, if the writer accepts all invitations to contribute (and he can't consistently refuse after having accepted one) he finds himself so loaded up with commitments that there's no time left for other work.

A professional has no business in amateur publications. Not near as much as an amateur writer has in professional magazines. There are many instances where amateurs turn out work superior to that of professionals, but if they do that consistently they soon graduate into professional ranks and lose their amateur standing. Meantime, the amateur press should remain what it's always striven to be, a proving-ground for those who are trying their wings, giving them a chance to practice and show what they can do while affording entertainment to their fellow fans and amateurs. In this respect the fan magazine may well be compared to the amateur theater or baseball club.

If they'd followed the pattern of the movie fan magazines, and confined themselves to gossip, criticism and "sidelights" on the professional situation they would have served a real purpose and contributed a valuable help to readers of fantasy. If they'd preserved a strictly amateur standing they would have offered a testing ground for amateur writers making toward professionalism, just as the sand lots provide a proving ground for major league ball players. But when in their efforts to outdo each other they bespeak the work of professional writers they defeat their own purpose, devote space which should be accorded the best efforts of promising amateurs to the worst output of professionals, and—worst of all—put themselves in competition with publishers who have all their money, all their experience and all their talent invested in commercial enterprises which must show a profit or go out of business.

The fan magazine has a useful function. It can offer a forum for absolutely free and untrammeled discussion such as no professional magazine can, a place where readers can express themselves fully and freely, without fear of "editing" or censoring. Free from any commercial compulsion it can say editorially, "Quinn stinks," or hand an orchid to William Wallace Scrubbottom of whom no one ever heard until his story, The Twelve Tubs of Turbulent Gore, was printed in the current issue

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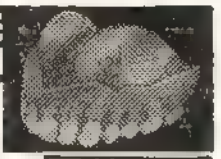

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of Fantastic Horrifications, and hail him as the logical successor to Bram Stoker, H. P. Lovecraft and Manly Wade Wellman. Thus they help form (reader) public opinion, thus they reflect it, without fear, favor or bias.

But when they try to emulate the professional magazines, and exult over the bagging of an occasional contribution from some well-known professional, (and you can bet it's one of his worst, or he'd have sold it for real dough, and not made the generous gesture of giving it to his "little friends") they aren't doing right by their readers, they are perverting their mission, and, without materially helping themselves, they're merely increasing competition in a field already almost incredibly competitive.

Think this over, Friend Dunmire, and though you'll probably announce to a waiting world that Quinn's *un hijo de una perra*, I believe you'll ultimately come to the conclusion that he's also correct in his position.

Cordially yours,

SEABURY QUINN

Give a Ghost His Due

From Gadsden, Alabama, Miss Mary Elizabeth Counselman writes:

I'm organizing a sort of "psychic research" club—to give phantoms the once-over—and see how many WEIRD TALES fans can be flushed out of the shrubbery! The aims of my ghost investigating group were pretty well summed up by Harold Helfer in his column, *Byways of Birmingham*, when he wrote:

> **The Ghosts Will Have to Offer Proof—**
>
> Pretty soon there is going to be a market here for haunted houses. Mary Elizabeth Counselman is going to get up a society for investigating ghosts, and, when—and if—they are found, giving them their proper recognition.
>
> I guess maybe you've heard about Mary Elizabeth. She's the young Gadsden woman who writes weird, death-rattling stories in the pulp magazines.
>
> Now Mary Elizabeth is a level-headed person and although she writes about the most bizarre things, such as planets colliding and people being murdered by blunt instruments, she is unwilling to accept any fact without plenty of proof. But she says the fact remains that some very odd unexplained things really do happen. So she would like to have a society in our town to get to the bottom of them when they happen here.
>
> In short, Mary Elizabeth says the burden of proof as to the existence of a ghost will be up to the ghost himself; but once his existence is established he will be given his rightful due and a proper announcement about him will be made.

And, meanwhile, I'm working on a creepy local-interest angle which has to do with *Parasite Mansion*. So—perhaps all WEIRD TALES readers in this neighborhood who are interested in a "shade society" will get in touch with me? I guarantee we'll corner the ghost market!

Outstanding Service

"You are performing an outstanding service in making *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* available to that part of Lovecraft's public which finds it difficult to afford a copy of *The Outsider and Others;* and that is a large part, believe me," writes August Derleth from Sauk City, Wisconsin. He goes on to say that the Lovecraft collection will soon be out of print —and that:

The Shadow Over Innsmouth has never before seen publication in any magazine, or in any general form whatever, with the exception of once having been produced in book form in a privately printed and extremely limited edition. This tale is one of the best, the most exciting of the longer tales belonging to the Cthulhu Mythology. Reference to it was made in at least two of my WEIRD TALES stories (*The Return of Hastur, Beyond the Threshold*), which more than anything I can say testifies to the powerful hold it has upon the imagination of its readers. The precise place of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* in the Cthulhu Mythology is not certain, but Donald and I have placed it between *The Whisperer in Darkness* and *The Shadow Out of Time.* It was written before *The Haunter of the Dark, The Dreams in the Witch-House,* and *The Thing on the Doorstep,* and only *At the Mountains of Madness* apart from *The Shadow Out of Time* followed it in the Cthulhu Mythos. That means that it followed closely in sequence upon some of the most successful of Lovecraft's stories—*The Dunwich Horror, The Call of Cthulhu,* and *The Colour Out of Space.* It is a dark, brooding story, typical of Lovecraft at his best.

Makes Long Evenings Short

Harry R. Stout, Jr., writes from Fort Riley, Kansas:

I am a soldier in the army of these United States of America, and I am proud of it. I have only been a soldier six months, but I have already acquired the habits of a soldier. Staying in and reading is one. I don't know a finer book than WEIRD TALES to spend these long evenings with. In my opinion it is the finest of its type. The editors do their level best to keep the standard of the stories high in each issue. The authors are fine and the illustrations are above reproach. If you always keep the magazine as well knit as now I will always be one of your most ardent fans.

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Fantasy's Five-Cent Cigar

This month's issue of WEIRD TALES is superb. Undoubtedly, *Dreamers' Worlds* takes first place. August Derleth slipped this issue. Most of the time Derleth goes over big with me but *Compliments of Spectro* didn't hit the spot. But as long as you print stories like *Chameleon Man*, you may be sure I'll buy the magazine. Stories of this type are fantasy's good five-cent cigar.

Just in case this sees print—if anyone in Chicago has started or wants to start a chapter of the WEIRD TALES CLUB, please let me know and I will cooperate to the best of my ability. Pen pals are welcome.

Jack Roch
1161 S. Scoville Ave., Oak Park, Ill.

Gang of Girls

Please enroll me in your club. I enjoy all the stories in your magazine. Thrilling, exciting and mysterious are three good adjectives describing your stories. There are a gang of girls waiting to see my card. They will all join later.

Reta L. Theard
6505 Minerva Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Independent "Spook" Club

I have only read two issues of your magazine, but I am deeply interested. I am a student of the mystic, so will someone please tell me where I can find books dealing with the arts so vividly portrayed in *Beyond the Threshold*, by August Derleth. I would like to get in touch with Los Angeles members and build an independent "spook" club as a branch of the WEIRD TALES CLUB.

Albert Walker, Jr.

Hotel Brevoort and Tropical Garden Villas,
6326 Lexington at Vine, Hollywood, Calif.

Voodoo Specialist

I have been a reader of WEIRD TALES since the first issue. I am an American by birth, but lived in South America and the Islands from the time I was one until five years ago. Now I'm settled here for good, and as I have few friends here would enjoy hearing from anyone with the same interests as mine.

I know a great deal about Voodoo and have seen several of their ceremonial rites. Some of the things they do are impossible to believe unless seen. I collect stories about them. Would be glad to answer any questions I can about these rites.

Am also interested in crystal gazing for my own amusement, and would like to hear of anyone being successful in this.

Sincerely yours,

Dorotea M. Rowe.

R. D. No. 1,
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(Continued on next page)

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We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion of the names of all New Members. The rest will appear next time.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of WEIRD TALES, published bi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1941, State of New York, County of New York, ss.

Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared William J. Delaney, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the President-Treasurer of the WEIRD TALES, Publishers of WEIRD TALES, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, (and if a daily paper, the circulation), etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publisher:* WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.; *Editor:* D. McIlwraith, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.; *Managing Editor:* None; *Business Manager:* W. J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owner is: SHORT STORIES, INC., 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y. Stockholders owning or holding one per cent or more of total amount of stock: William J. Delaney, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

(Signed) W. J. DELANEY, *President.*

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 22nd day of September, 1941.

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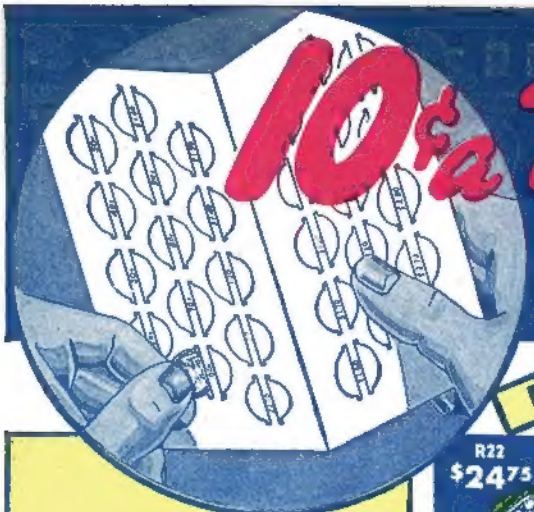

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